IN SEARCH OF GREENER GRASS:

FINDING THE PATH

FROM ENGLISH HEGEMONY

TO MULTILINGUALISM

A Thesis Submitted

to the College of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of Master of Education

in the Department of Educational Foundations

University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the meaning of English language hegemony as I, the researcher, have experienced it. Using an autoethnographic method, I recount stories of multilingual language learning that uncover the themes of hegemony (Gramsci, 1992), unilateral power (Loomer, 1976) and privilege as they relate to the English language in the world today. These stories are drawn from a lifetime of language learning in different multilingual environments: from experiences of informal language learning in the home, formal education in different languages throughout childhood and adolescence, and finally adult experiences of language learning as an English language teacher and member of a bilingual household.

With the narrative material as a basis, I highlight the interrelated concepts of hegemony, unilateral power and privilege in these experiences of language learning. I take a critical stance in my investigation and analysis of the hegemony, unilateral power and privilege that the English language enjoys at the expense of other languages. I examine the meaning of these concepts and how they have affected my understanding of language as a native English speaker, language learner and English language teacher, in Canada and abroad.

As an alternative to the hegemony of English, I propose a counter-hegemonic approach: learning about language and culture in relationship with others in communities where linguistic diversity and multilingualism are genuinely accepted, and not merely perceived, as valuable. I suggest that multilingualism and language learning are vital for native English speakers to understand alternative perspectives of our world, and in order for them to experience a transformation in their grasp of linguistic and cultural diversity.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My name may be on the title page of this work, but it could not have come to fruition were it not for the involvement and support of a few people to whom I owe a tremendous debt of gratitude:

Dr. Howard Woodhouse, my thesis supervisor, whose unwavering commitment to the highest standards drove me to wring everything I could into this first attempt at "serious" scholarship. Thank you, Howard, for the effort you invested in guiding me along the darkest parts of this path while still allowing me to have a voice and vision of my own.

Dr. Dianne Hallman, of my advisory committee: thank you for the opportunity to learn from you in this process and to discover a new dimension of myself and my work in feminist thought.

Dr. Angela Ward, also of my advisory committee: thank you for revealing a new understanding of the impact of language on our lives and our relationships.

Dr. Richard Julien, external examiner: *merci pour ta passion pour la francophonie et pour l'exploration de possibilités en éducation linguistique au-delà de l'anglais!* I am grateful for the time, thought and energy you took to act as external examiner on this thesis.

Dr. Michael Collins, oral defence chair: thank you for sowing the seed that started this thesis – I deeply appreciate many of the ideas I learned from you, that I will continue to reap in the future.

The College of Graduate Studies and Research at the University of Saskatchewan: thank you for a generous graduate scholarship that permitted me to pursue my studies with the knowledge that this financial support would see me through.

The staff in the department of Educational Foundations at the U of S, as well as other staff in the College of Education: thank you for the daily work you do that makes the life of a student that much easier and more enjoyable.

Dr. Dennis Sumara, of the University of Alberta: thank you for your kind efforts in sharing your work with me when I could not otherwise access the research material I needed.

My mother and her parents, my *nagymama* and *nagypapa*: *köszönöm* for instilling in me a love for the music and beauty of different languages.

My father: thank you for your critical, albeit caring, interest in my research.

All my family: thank you for the time and effort you took to read and approve the manuscript for this work.

My friend and colleague Brenda: thank you for your intellectual companionship and inimitable sense of humour – you have an uncanny gift for making me think and laugh simultaneously, when I need it most.

My husband and lifesaver: *ich kann Dir nicht genug danken* for your indefatigable encouragement and faith in me when I stumbled and fell on this path. I could, quite frankly, never have made it without you.

DEDICATION

Für meinen allerliebsten Sprachenlehrer:

den Mann meiner Träume,

den König meines Herzens,

und die Liebe meines Lebens.

Immer, ausschließlich und ohne jede Ausnahme …

… und für unsere zukünftigen Kinder.

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CHAPTER ONE:
Origins

The lay of the land

When I began to cast about for a thesis topic, I wondered where to look. Above all, I wanted my research to provoke and tantalize readers: I wanted to light fires in minds, and especially in hearts. What experience had I had that might be used as a contribution to a larger pool of knowledge, and also as a springboard for others to leap from and re-evaluate their own experiences in a different light? To be sure, I have grown up a certain way, in a certain place, with certain ideas about the world. But what is unusual about that way, that place and those ideas? How can these things be related to the larger experience of humanity? That is where my search originated.

My home town is an idyllic place to grow up: it is surrounded by resplendent lakes and ancient hills that roll through pastoral valleys, coated with forests, fields, orchards and vineyards. The climate is one of the most appealing in the country and there are clearly good reasons why this area – the Okanagan valley in southern British Columbia – has become one of the most popular locations to settle in Canada. Although I spent my formative years in the heart of this natural magnificence, I never truly appreciated it until I left and explored the world beyond. It was only from the outside, when I was living in an urban jungle of concrete and steel, that I was able to discover how fortunate I had been to spend my early life in such an environment. In order to fully recognize the good fortune I had had, I needed to go away, to be separated from that place, so as to learn to cherish it.

By the same token, I have been privileged with – but have not always appreciated – an opportunity few people get in their lifetimes. From birth, I have been exposed to different languages and learned to use and understand them. My mother spoke her language, Hungarian, to me as an infant; I was en-

rolled in the local French immersion program at school and later completed my studies in Quebec; I have lived, travelled and worked in multilingual environments and I have grown up to marry a German who emigrated to Canada, where we continue to use his first language at home. Like the beauty that I was surrounded by in the landscape of my childhood and early youth, I did not learn to be grateful for these different languages and what they have brought me until I went beyond the bounds of my linguistic and cultural ease. It was only when I was thrust into environments where I needed to make use of these languages – or struggle because I did not speak the right language – that I realized how each one opens another dimension of experience. By being induced to put other languages into practice through study, work and travel abroad, I saw and heard the world through words that were foreign to me and, consequently, unleashed ideas I had not thought possible. Returning to Canada to live, work and study in a predominantly English environment has heightened my awareness of the importance of linguistic diversity in my experience and my understanding of the world.

Languages have always been a part of my life and a part of who I am – they are so integrated into my understanding of the world and the purpose I serve in it that I have always taken my multilingualism for granted. I have always assumed that exposure to various languages throughout my life was a providential turn of fate, and that I could do nothing but reap the benefit of this good fortune. After years of simply accepting the fact that I have had these opportunities – indeed, these privileges – bestowed upon me unsolicited, I have been reminded that these are not elements of the average North American's life or identity and are not to be taken for granted.

Sowing the seed

The seed from which this thesis germinates was sown by a single word: hegemony. I recall the day I was occupied with last-minute preparation for a class, and the word virtually sprang off the page at me. It seemed to take on a life of its own in my mind – for the first time, it occurred to me on a truly conscious level that hegemony, with its sense of power imbalance and domination, per-

vades our society in more ways than we can imagine. My understanding came not from grasping the word itself, but from gleaning how the phenomenon of hegemony effectively manifests itself in our world and how it has manifested itself in my life in countless ways.

As I read the words my professor had written, "the term *hegemony* refers to the influence predominant groups – nation states, powerful ethnic groups, ruling classes – are able to exert over others" (Collins, 1998, p. xi, original emphasis), I pondered the task of trying to define hegemony. When I consider the effects of hegemony in the world, I liken it to the societal assumptions of unquestioned power that we all harbour at some level of our consciousness. Hegemony is such a complex concept that it is difficult to pin down clearly and concisely; I will explore the notion and its ramifications in the context of this thesis shortly.

For some reason, I immediately thought of language when I contemplated hegemony in my own experience. Language, culture and difference within these realms have always fascinated me. It struck me on that day as I was reading for my class that certain languages enjoy a kind of power that stems from hegemony. By agreeing to compromise one language in favour of another, we are granting this power and accepting hegemony unquestioningly. English has been especially remarkable in gaining power this way. The central goal of hegemony is to persuade the majority that the *status quo* serves their best interests, whatever those may be (Entwistle, 1979, Gramsci, 1992). In the non-English speakers' act of learning English or in the typically native-English-speaking expectation that English will be spoken all around the world, the *status quo* of English as the *lingua franca* of the world is maintained, and its power remains unchallenged. Seeing the word "hegemony" on the page of my textbook somehow spurred me into a new place in my thinking about the role that it plays in the languages I have learned and encountered in my experience. From this sown seed, my thesis began to grow.

Hegemonic language

Hegemony was developed as a theory by the Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci at the beginning of the twentieth century. Gramsci was incarcerated by the fascist government under Mussolini for several years; it is primarily the *Letters* and *Notebooks* he produced while in prison that comprise the work that conceptualized hegemony as it is understood and applied in various ways today (Entwistle, 1979). Entwistle's research on Gramsci has been an important addition to the literature on social justice, philosophy and politics in education. In clarifying Gramsci's idea, he illustrates how hegemony goes beyond influence in different contexts:

> The notion of hegemony is mostly familiar in political history and international affairs where it refers to situations in which one nation exercises political, cultural or economic influence over others. But, following Lenin, Gramsci extended its reference to apply to relationships between groups, especially social classes. Hence, one social class can be thought of as exercising hegemony over 'subaltern' classes. (p. 11)

Entwistle discusses what Collins (1998) highlighted in his definition: the role of *influence* exerted by powerful groups over those with less "clout". But Entwistle goes further to draw out the importance of relationships or dynamics between classes in society: he acknowledges influence but touches on the element of domination that a ruling class may exercise over a subordinate or "subaltern" class.

Influence is only one way to capture the subtlety of hegemony in society; it also consists of unquestioned power exercised through a range of social relations and cultural institutions, like schools. Entwistle (1979) cites Gramsci in his explanation that

> hegemonic direction is by moral and intellectual persuasion rather than control by the police, the military, or the coercive power of the law: 'rule by intellectual and moral hegemony is the form of power which gives stability and founds power on wide-ranging consent and acquiescence'. … control of the subaltern classes is much more subtly exercised than is often supposed; it operates persuasively rather than coercively through cultural institutions – churches, labour unions and other workers' associations, schools and the press. (p. 12)

This suggests the persuasive aspect of cultural institutions, including those teaching languages, especially English. Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) critically examines the manipulative and destructive role the education system plays in homogenizing languages and diminishing linguistic diversity around the world.

Influence, *power* and *control* are all legitimate and complementary interpretations of what hegemony means and how it plays itself out in our lives. Depending on the context we are working in, any of these aspects of the term may emerge to describe the situation, while others may be inappropriate. For instance, in the context of language policies and education in Canada, school boards may be influenced by minority populations to teach their languages in certain regions of the country, while these minority groups are by no means hegemonic within Canadian society as a whole. On the other hand, English enjoys a tremendous power base all across North America, and this is closely connected to the various forms of control that the public media and institutions exert on society.

The English language is an integral component of the *status quo* in North America. The hegemony of English persuades citizens "that maintenance of the *status quo* could not but be in [their] own best interests." (Entwistle, 1979, p. 13) When I was first confronted with Collins' (1998) use of the term hegemony, I found myself admitting that I had benefited from English hegemony over and over in my life, *despite* my multilingualism: my "own best interests" are served by the hegemony of English. I felt directly implicated by having accepted and used the power that English holds. With this new understanding of my experience, I started to re-evaluate what multilingualism means in our ever more monolingual English surroundings.

At the same time, I now feel it necessary to offer an option to English hegemony as it is critiqued in this thesis. My purpose is twofold: first, to provide a critical analysis of English hegemony as it has played itself out in my lived experience in order to raise awareness of how it is present in most of our lives; second, to examine ways we can counter-balance the hegemony of English and become truly open to linguistic diversity and multilingual learning. Ultimately, I

am exploring better ways of being, knowing and living in an English-dominant world. I have started on a search for greener grass.

Nurturing greener grass

After spending a few years living and working in foreign countries, I returned to Canada only to feel a vacuum around me: I felt culturally and linguistically severed from the diversity I had come to embrace and expect while I was away. I realized how my knowledge of various languages had helped me to better understand foreign perspectives and how the English language is a driving force behind the international expansion of North American popular culture, and all of the positive and negative effects thereof. I began to think about how multilingual environments affect people's comprehension of the complexities of the world we all live in and how learning different languages benefits our collective experience of the world. My experiences with other languages and cultures allowed me to glimpse the opportunities that accompany exposure to more languages. My return to a predominantly English environment brought about a longing for the richer multilingual environments that I had known before. Somehow life in a single language seemed more muted and monochromatic than the resonant and lively abundance of many layers of neighbouring languages.

My longing for something more than "English only" led to a search for more meaning in my work and the pursuit of graduate studies in education. I knew there was a better way for me to contribute to the world and that there were more interesting ways for me to make those contributions. My last occupation before returning to university was that of English language teacher, instructing immigrants, refugees and international students in English as a second language (ESL). This was an ironic area for me to work in, as I had spent a good deal of time as a child and as an adolescent immersed in languages other than English. Perhaps my work as a language teacher was prompted by my own interest in foreign languages and cultures, which grew into a desire to share languages and cultures with people who came from different places. This sharing was especially important for me in education, for in working with students who

wished to learn English – a foreign language to them – I attempted to deepen my own learning about the cultures and languages that were brought into the classroom.

The old adage tells us that *the grass is always greener on the other side*, implying that we are unable to recognize the advantages and benefits of the place we are currently in. It is human nature to wish for something more, for a better life. No matter where we are in the world, no matter what we are doing or how we are doing it, we strive for something beyond what we have in the moment (Winter, 2003). We believe that if we can only get over this hill, around the next corner, reach the other side of a given boundary, real or fictitious, that we will find what we are looking for.

Occasionally, we feel lucky enough to be in a position where we believe we have found what we are looking for. We are convinced that we have "arrived" and wonder why more people have not also reached this point. Such is the case, in my experience, with many native English speakers who tend to believe they have everything they need to achieve their goals in a globalized and shrinking world. Conversely, those who do not speak English but wish to progress and make a better life for themselves "need" to learn English to do so (Fishman, 1976). Apparently, English is *the* language to learn if one is to "get ahead" (M. Blackmon, personal communication, March 15, 2001; Fishman, 1976; Tsuda, n.d.) in the world.

Among the works I have perused for this thesis, I came across a particularly interesting book published in conjunction with a British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) television program: *The story of English* (McCrum, Cran & MacNeil, 1987). This work traces the history of the English language and outlines in no uncertain terms the wondrous gift of English that was bestowed first upon the British Empire and has now been welcomed with open arms around the planet. The synopsis on the back cover hints at the miracle of English that the book heralds:

> *The Story of English*, a brilliant history of the evolution of the English language, takes you on a series of absorbing journeys across a vast expanse of time, space, and terrain – from Anglo-Saxon Britain to Reagan's America. In lively, anecdotal, and informative chapters, the authors show how English moved from the

> villages of Britain to the New World: how it was carried in slave ships from Africa to America's South; how it was scattered with the soldiers and servants of the British Empire to Australia, Canada, India, and the Far East. Today, English is the language of international commerce, diplomacy, religion, and the popular arts. … the first global language.

The accompanying reviews include such affirmations as "one of the most fascinating of subjects" – dare we conclude that this refers to English and its devastating but highly efficient spread through colonial domination? In the above summary, it is interesting to note the vocabulary associated with the book and hence with English: brilliant, absorbing, vast, carried, scattered, first. These words imply something beyond mere language: a panacea to be distributed or kernels to be planted and harvested for future seasons of plenty, offering abundance that could in no other way be accessible but through the marvel of the language we have all been lucky enough to "profit" from.

English has been placed in an almost messianic light by being equated with automatic access to conspicuous consumption, political and religious "freedom", democracy and capitalism, economic expansion and technological advancement (McCrum, Cran & MacNeil, 1987; Pennycook, 1994, 1998; Phillipson, 1992; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). Around the world, people are convinced that English really is the best language to learn for acquiring material wealth: convictions such as this constitute the cornerstones of English hegemony. Those of us who have grown up surrounded by North American television, radio and the so-called free press do not want for any other manner of expressing ourselves. English fulfills our every linguistic need, and if others do not speak it, they can learn, for it is the most popular second or foreign language being learned in the world today (McCrum, Cran & MacNeil, 1987; Pennycook, 1994; Phillipson, 1992, 1997; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000).

In a critical examination of the dynamics involved in teaching and learning English, Auerbach (1993) analyzes the phrase "native speaker" and how it is used to describe a certain dominant group. She claims that the term is "an ideological construct to the extent that it implies a single, idealized native English" (p. 25). Explaining that "the term has de facto been used to refer to white Britons from the dominant groups" (p. 25), Auerbach concludes that the privileges

of this group have been upheld "because these native speakers are seen to be the model speakers of English" (p. 25). The assumptions and associations Auerbach highlights in the use of the term "native speaker" are not absent in this thesis: I am aware that I have used the phrase here in subconscious reference to this privileged group. I also recognize that it does not do justice to native English speakers from Asia, Africa or other areas of the world where local multilingualism has shaped language and identity differently from those of native English speakers living in a monolingual environment.

In the context of this work, I use "native (English) speaker" to denote anyone who has grown up speaking English in a predominantly monolingual setting (at home, at school and at work) and who continues to use English as their preferred language to communicate in their day-to-day life. Though I have had the chance to learn other languages in my life, I still consider myself a native English speaker in this sense, as the language has been omnipresent in my life: I continue to use English most frequently and feel most comfortable communicating in English. In an attempt to be straightforward, I refer to "non-native" or "non-English" speakers though I do not wish to deny the languages these people use as *native* speakers.

When pressed, native English speakers may admit to feeling fortunate to speak English and benefitting from the power of the language. But on a day-to-day basis, we feel that we have somehow earned the right to exercise the power of English (Fishman, 1976): that we are entitled to travel abroad and expect people with different mother tongues to speak to us in ours, that the academics of the world will automatically use English to present at conferences and publish their findings, that the vast majority of important or "ground-breaking" information will be made available in English (Tsuda, n.d.). Contrary to scholars who do not speak English as their first language, native-English-speaking graduate students are not normally compelled to learn a foreign language to survive in their field of research.

English does indeed enjoy a power and a position in the world that no other language currently has. But how just is that power and that position? Language is something that is integral to our very beings: it goes far beyond

mere transmission of information. Language and the ways we use it represent our worldview and express who we are and how we feel about being in the world. We have long wished for a *lingua franca* that would presumably bring the cultures, races and nations of the world closer together. We need to beware of our wishes, though, for in wishing fervently enough for something, our desires may come to pass with consequences we had not anticipated. Today, English is as close to a *lingua franca* as we have come, but what price have other languages paid for this to take place?

Despite the many advantages of speaking English as North American native speakers, we miss so much when we have but a singular view of the world through a single language. My mother and maternal grandparents (who were forced by circumstance to learn several languages) have repeatedly told me that I am as many people as the languages I speak. Edwards (1994) refers to a renaissance quote of Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, "quot linguas calles, tot homines vales" (p. 4), meaning exactly what I heard from my family. My own experience with languages and multilingualism has demonstrated to me that there is so much more to be understood in the world when we reach beyond the confines of a single language. Contrary to what we have grown to accept as the reality and apparent ideal of English homogeneity, the grass is far greener where more languages abound than where we are all restricted to speaking one and the same language.

We rarely stop to ask ourselves why English homogeneity holds such a grip. Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) challenges us to demand why; she warns that those posing the dreaded "why" questions are regularly put in a highly charged position, often ostracized by less "political" colleagues. For in requiring reasons for injustices, such as why native English speakers are given a head start by virtue of their first language, politics enter the parameters of research. From the viewpoint of language education, Skutnabb-Kangas clarifies that "*not* asking why questions is part of the ESL tradition. Most ESL traditions have done and are still very strongly doing what Freire and others have criticized: attempting to **depoliticize the language of schooling** (Giroux, 1985, xiv)." (p. xxii, original emphasis) Indeed, from my experience as both a student and teacher of language, I

have noted how most people, both native English speakers and non-English speakers, expect that speakers of other languages will take the responsibility to learn English: this is the most convenient and least resisted option, though few people ask *why* this happens.

In interpreting the allegory of greener grass, we may also suppose that lusher pastures simply do not exist, that regardless of our seeking something better, we will not find it. This may mean that the spread of English around the world is a necessity – if not a boon – that goes hand-in-hand with the international development of technology and the global expansion of economic trade. Multilingualism, meanwhile, is nothing more than a laudable but unattainable ideal. In the face of such a perspective, I maintain that there is indeed greener grass to be found in multilingualism – for native English speakers as well as for non-native English speakers – and that the benefits it can bring are more valuable than we believe. Multilingualism and linguistic diversity do not *replace* the position of English in the world, but rather serve as a state of being and thinking *to counterbalance* the powerful and hegemonic role that English plays on the world stage.

With this work, I go further than the discoveries I have made in graduate school, and beyond my work in teaching ESL: I go back to my earliest recollections of language, when my mother spoke Hungarian to me in the first days, months and years of my life. This thesis is divided into time frames that reflect the different experiences and environments of my multilingual learning: my childhood and adolescence at home and at school, and my adulthood travelling, working and living both abroad and in Canada. Beginning with my research question: *What is English language hegemony and how can it be counteracted?*, I use these stories to analyze the hegemony of English in my life and in the broader context of society; I ultimately propose multilingualism in education as a way to change the *status quo* and counteract English hegemony.

Why multilingualism?

From the time I became conscious of my own learning – whether it was at home, in school, or in my daily work and activities – I had a vague sense that

the knowledge and skills I was gathering were not really providing me with everything I wanted to understand about the world I lived in. I felt there must be *more*: other ways of living, working and communicating with others. I yearned to force myself out of the bounds of the places, languages and cultures I grew up with. I felt there must be greener grass in my learning, but I did not know where to look.

Because I grew up in a home and in a school setting that allowed me to explore different languages, one of the ways I conceived of exploring life was to visit other places, where other languages were spoken – languages that I did not know. As I have stated above, we yearn for things we do not have, and though I could use Hungarian, English and French with relative ease by the end of my secondary studies, since childhood I had dreamt of nothing more than to learn a "truly" foreign language. Once I had completed CÉGEP, the post-secondary level of education that precedes university in Quebec, I departed as quickly as I could for undiscovered lands where the horizons of my linguistic knowledge would be forced to broaden. I had no desire to go to school in any official capacity – I merely wished to immerse myself in another language, place and way of life.

The privilege to move about and travel in order to learn another language is not one most people enjoy. I recognize that my case is unusual. However, it is not necessary to go to a different place in the world for the purpose of learning a foreign language. Due to the nature of the world's constantly changing demographics, we have the potential to learn a wide range of languages, either formally or informally.

North America is a prime example of this (Fishman, 1976): the continent was settled first by a richly diverse indigenous population and more recently by immigrants who have come from afar and, to a degree, have brought their languages and cultures with them. By and large, within a single generation from the time of emigration to this continent, the language most used – regardless of whence the people came – is English (Cafferty, 1980, in Sledd, 1990; Herriman & Burnaby, 1996; Lopez, 1982b, in Sledd, 1990; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). Power and opportunity are strongly associated with the ability to express oneself in

English (Pennycook, 1994; Phillipson, 1992; Tsuda, n.d.), while the languages immigrants came with are devalued, both in education and in general (Corson, 1995; Cummins & Danesi, 1990; Herriman & Burnaby, 1996; Olneck, 2000). The languages of ancestors or of traditionally important communities, be they indigenous or immigrant, are becoming less and less important as we move into an era and lifestyle dictated by unprecedented acceleration through technology and enormous media influence. Our world in this new millennium communicates increasingly in English.

Are multilingualism and the promotion of foreign languages in education realistic alternatives in the face of this rapid transformation? The headlong momentum to ever more English in the world requires us to rethink the place that other languages hold in the fields of politics, economics, societal development, the arts, and scientific research, to name a few. The tremendous resources offered to us by languages other than English can provide a balance and openness in our perspective. We need to ask *why* other languages hold a lesser place to English and how the situation can change. We need to consider what the role of education has been in contributing to the current situation, and what it might be for lasting change to occur. Learning another language consists of fostering relationships in community: by listening to others we learn from their experience and gain a fresh view of our world. Being open to multilingualism and acquiring a knowledge of other languages constitutes building the frame of a window to look out at the world with new eyes and ears, with a heart and mind less encumbered by our cultural and linguistic norms. It is not about competition and exclusion: it is about acceptance and inclusion.

Methodology: Why stories?

Lives can read like stories; they often serve as examples of successes or failures for us to learn from, providing informative views on the world. Stories inevitably strike a chord: they are a unifying element of humanity. There is a special sense of engagement that comes from research based on stories. Carter (1993) claims that "story is a mode of knowing that captures in a special fashion the

richness and the nuances of meaning in human affairs" (p. 6). I also believe I can access a richer understanding of my research through stories.

The most important criterion in looking for my research area was passion: I wanted to feel passionately about something, so that I could research and write passionately. My experience and what I have learned from it inspire a passion in me that I have not found in any other approach to academic research.

When I saw the word "hegemony" in my professor's book, I suddenly understood that the position of English maintains the impression that a single *lingua franca* improves intercultural communication and understanding, to the benefit of everyone. I have often asked myself why I was drawn to work in English language teaching while I travelled abroad and after I returned to Canada. Is the English language not a hegemonic presence amongst the world's other languages? It goes beyond simply learning a new mode of communication: does English not have colonial remnants (Pennycook, 1998; Phillipson, 1992) and a homogenizing supremacy that are rarely put into question (Tsuda, n.d.)?

This focus was the coming together of issues that are of utmost importance to me: concerns about language rights; questions surrounding power imbalance and privilege; and the role of English in the current state of our world.

The reason this word – hegemony – and the ensuing thought process have struck me so powerfully is because I feel directly implicated by my life experience. In searching for a research method, I needed to consider how my experience could serve as a resource in the research process. One such method is autoethnography: using stories of my own experience as a starting point for research. Neilsen's (1998) case for stories in research is convincing:

> Not enough has been written about our motives, our locations, our vested personal and political interests. Feminist perspectives [such as autoethnography] have shown us how the *flesh of story* embraces, disturbs, and connects more strongly than disembodied, neutralized text. If we aim to change our worlds in small ways by the work we do, we owe those worlds as authentic a presence as we can bring. (p. 10, emphasis added)

The flesh of my stories is composed of memories. These memories are based on concrete recollections, highlights and details that have stood out for

me. As I bring these memories forth from the past and relate them to concepts that impact others in the future, I am creating new realities based on one life and one set of experiences. My stories may or may not be reflections of others' experiences.

Beginning from my own experience of hegemony, I can discern the variety of ways in which it has played itself out in my life. Beginning with who I am, here and today, I can situate my experience of English language hegemony and make meaning of it in the larger context of the present-day world. By using an autoethnographic method, and uncovering English hegemony in my own experience, I would like readers of my story to become aware of its importance in theirs. With this awareness, we will be better equipped to imagine alternatives to the *status quo* and consider ways in which to meet the challenge of English language hegemony. By pondering our own experiences of English hegemony in our past, present and future, we become more mindful of what it means to be active and informed members of a community open to cultural and linguistic diversity.

As a Canadian, I am a typical hybrid, a child of immigrants. It is the combination of cultures and languages in my background that is curious. On my mother's side, I am a second generation Hungarian – I was born in Canada while she and her family came here as immigrant refugees. On my father's side, I am one of a long line of Scottish White Anglo-Saxon Protestants (WASPs), some of whom have been settled in this country for centuries, others who are just a generation or two ahead of me. The juxtaposition of these heritages is not a unique one, especially in the classically Canadian circumstance of cultural mosaics. However, that does not subtract from the inevitable tension that exists between these two aspects of my cultural and linguistic identity and the equilibrium that I try to strike between them. In deconstructing the experience of growing up and living in this jumble of cultural allegiances and languages, I notice patterns recurring throughout my life and my experience, all of which are a part of me – culminating in here and today. Narrating and re-creating my experience based on memory, I can depict more clearly the path of my life that

has brought me to the point of asking why we keep moving toward English language domination and what can be done to balance out this movement.

In formulating my research question for this thesis, I sought a way in which to speak to readers on a level at which they would be stimulated. "My wish is that [my storied experiences] resonate in the reader's memory and experience: yes, I've been there. Yes, I know this story." (Neilsen, 1998, p. 13) I want my story to inspire reflection of readers' own experiences and move them to wonder how the issues conveyed in *my* story exist in *their* lives. The stories of my lived experience can trigger memories among readers that resound with the themes addressed here: how hegemony has had an impact on their lives and how that hegemony is exhibited in their use of language. Reflecting on their experience, people who read this thesis may be spurred into addressing newly-discovered perspectives and taking different approaches in their daily lives. In the Freirean sense of *praxis*, reflection is strengthened and complemented by action to initiate positive transformation in our lives.

Ellis and Bochner (2000) argue for

> a form that will allow readers to feel the moral dilemmas, think with our story instead of about it, join actively in the decision points that define an autoethnographic project, and consider how their lives can be made a story worth telling. (p. 735)

Decision points in a story are an indication of the researcher's priorities, of how the research question forms the story that emerges. Autoethnography compels us to witness and acknowledge the ways and reasons stories about self are created for research. For me, autoethnography means distilling a significant issue from my lived experience and sharing it in a story to open a space of thoughtfulness about how we can live and grow in novel ways.

Opening spaces by pushing the boundaries of scholarship is part of using a narrative approach. By the same token, an autobiographical method is almost singular in its capacity to push the boundaries of what we use as "data" in research. Memory and the re-creation of lived experience do not provide rational, measurable "facts". Reflecting through (auto)biography gives *both* the researcher *and* the reader an opportunity to continually revisit and learn from their memories of lived experience.

Pinar (1994) provides a comprehensive discussion of the role of autobiography in education. He speaks to the autobiographical function of reaching out to others while also broadening our inner consciousness: "Autobiography can serve as a method for enlarging, occupying and building the space of mediation. It enlarges the space by pushing back the edges of memory, disclosing more of what has been 'forgotten', suppressed and denied." (p. 217). Through the recall of autobiographical accounts, the researcher and the reader are drawn into the processes of retrospection and self-examination.

Autobiography is not restricted to a single individual and the stories recounted here are not mine alone. My family has been integral to the development of my understanding and awareness of the role that language plays in my life. They are central to the stories of my language learning that have provided material for this thesis. Out of respect for their own stories and their places in mine, I have asked the family members mentioned in this work to review and revise what I have written to ensure they are comfortable and satisfied with my narrative. I have invited their input throughout the writing process. To preserve anonymity, none of my family members have been identified here by name.

While the case for stories, autoethnography, and autobiography is a strong one, a certain wariness about its validity arises in some research circles. To be sure, researchers who self-indulgently wish to "tell their story" for the purposes of short-term gratification and drawing attention to themselves (as opposed to the issue they wish to bring forth) are not necessarily conducting sound, ethical research. One danger is "romanticizing" the voice that tells a story or narrative within a larger question, as Hargreaves (1996) argues. Above all else, he maintains that it is crucial the individual voice not engulf the more significant circumstances of the issue under discussion. Hargreaves uses the instance of educational research and the role that the teacher's voice has taken on in recent research:

> Some contexts create knowledge and experience that is liberating. Other contexts create knowledge and experience that is limiting. … It is perhaps time to contexualize the study of teachers' voices, knowledge, and experience more, and to romanticize and moralize about teachers' voices in general rather less. (p. 16)

My experiences are not examples of the "right" way to live in the world. I agree with Hargreaves' (1996) call to contextualize the narrative voice and wish to stress that my voice, memories and stories are merely one perspective meant to generate critical thought, reflection and the will to change. While my stories set the tone for my research, it is crucial that I link them to scholarship that deals with the larger questions of hegemony, language use and education.

The nature of my research is qualitative. Hence, the parameters of validity, accuracy and generalizability used in quantitative research are inappropriate for an approach based on memories of lived experience, which acts as a springboard to reach out and initiate discussion and reflection amongst others. Heshusius (1994) proposes a "participatory mode of consciousness" (p. 16), a taking up of our own identity and wholeness on "a deeper level of kinship between the knower and the known." (p. 16) When a reader is confronted with stories that push them to re-evaluate their own life, the reader joins the researcher in revisiting his or her experience and participates in a process of (re)discovering the research question in his or her own understanding of the world. This relates directly to Neilsen's (1998) description of a reader's response ("yes, I've been there") to research that connects him or her at "a deeper level" to the researcher's story and the issue of concern.

It is through an unleashing and sharing of experience that we validate subjectivity and the relevant criteria that are applicable to it. Stories are subjective by their very nature – never completely accurate and never the same each time we tell them. A story permits us to give voice and meaning to an issue that touches us directly, while holding it up to the lens of research connects it to the bigger picture of the world we share. The criteria of subjectivity are based on meaning-making rather than on proving a hypothesis, as in so-called objective research. One liberating aspect of qualitative approaches to research is the release of control: "somehow, any concept of rigor in relation to participatory consciousness must, in contradiction to past definitions, incorporate the *need not to be in charge*" (Heshusius, 1994, p. 20, emphasis added). Heshusius links the rigor of participation and awareness, of the collapsing of boundaries between knower and known, with a release of control by the researcher. He affirms that

the very strength of subjectivity lies in the researcher surrendering his or her story and inquiry to the reader so that the latter may explore it in a way that brings new meaning to light, regardless of the original intentions of the researcher. In setting down my story here, I am releasing it to the reader and taking the risk of being interpreted and critiqued beyond my control. But I am also offering a story that many may recognize as their own, in a unification of human experience that brings together a variety of "truths".

In accepting that we cannot – and never will be able to – have complete control over research, we (as qualitative and especially narrative researchers) embrace our human fallibility and relinquish the illusion of all-encompassing, value-free, "untainted" research. Lincoln (1995) has named this relative positioning (or, as she writes, "positionality") *standpoint epistemology*. By virtue of our individual standpoint, it is impossible for us to draw a conclusion that reflects the "truth" of a greater context (as is allegedly the case in quantitative research). *However*, in sharing, exchanging and joining stories of different experiences, we become increasingly aware of "truths" outside our own: Martin (1991) prompts us to engage in "open acknowledgement and discussion" (p. 159) with others to learn from standpoints beyond our own experience. She claims that the pluralism and proliferation of perspectives allows us to explore a wide range of world views. Lincoln (1995) paraphrases Palmer's conception "that new epistemologies might indeed create relational knowledge, the quality and rigor of which might be grounded in nonfragmenting, community-oriented ways of knowing" (p. 281). Dialogue unites our individual standpoints in a broader understanding of human experience, and eventually of the common good. The relational knowledge born of a multiplicity of stories *in community with one another* informs us of the hopes, dreams and needs of others *outside* and *in addition to* our own.

In her work, Lincoln (1995) also pinpoints the intimate link between qualitative research, awareness, transformation and action. The purpose of qualitative research is to bring new ideas to light that raise peoples' consciousness to the issues at hand. Ultimately, this can lead to an active engagement to change for the better.

The ideas which have been brought into the scope of my work are transformed by me at the same time as I am transformed by them. While my story is based on my own perspective, it "evokes in readers a feeling that the experience described is lifelike, believable, and possible" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 751). My narrative is only an infinitesimal part of a common, identifiable human experience. Yet it is a story – not absolutely accurate and consistent each time I produce it – that I actively and consciously create: "it is not there waiting to be found" (p. 751).

The stories from my lived experience comprise the basis for my research. From that lived experience, I want to bring illustrations of English hegemony and of multilingualism as a feasible counter-balance to it. I recount these stories in a narrative form, as I recall them at this point in time; I then use them for a textually-based analysis of the two main themes that emerge: English hegemony and multilingualism.

If there is one idea worth preserving from my wanderings through graduate school, it is the conviction that the *status quo* is not a chance happening – we are constantly in need of asking why and how things came to be the way they are. In so doing, the best place to start is with our own understanding of the world. With a perspective that critically gazes inwardly, we can better open ourselves to critically gaze outwardly on the community of which we are a part. Through this dual exercise of inward and outward reflection, we may be able to make sense of our own relationship to community and the world.

Why greener grass?

The notion of a search for greener grass came to me when I began to ruminate nostalgically upon my origins, as a multilingual person and as someone privileged by the physical and educational surroundings in which I grew up. I revisited the moment in my adolescence when I left my small home town to go to a large urban centre. I beat a swift path away without realizing that I was renouncing a part of myself in those hills and valleys, and in that community. In returning to those places and events in my memory, I thought of multilingualism in my life, and felt the same way: that I had, for a long time, not acknowledged

the wondrous advantages that languages have brought me. I became aware of how I have not always been grateful for the opportunities I have had with the experience of growing up multilingual. A fresh perspective came to me with this new interpretation of my experience of multilingualism, and this resonated with the images of landscape from my childhood: it was grass I had never seen as "greener" than usual.

The concept of a search emerged when I brought the elucidation of my experience to the fore of Canadian society I have grown up in: it is allegedly "multicultural" and multilingual (Cummins & Danesi, 1990), though English predominates. If English hegemony blankets our linguistic and cultural diversity in a dreary homogeneity, we must find a way to embrace relationships that invite that diversity to thrive, and to actively learn from it. The search for something that provided meaning and better understanding came almost naturally. I posed the question: if the experience of living as a multilingual language learner is greener grass than that of being a monolingual native English speaker, can we not find a way to make that greener grass a more convincing opportunity and attainable goal for more people?

In embarking on the written work of a thesis, I became preoccupied with the importance of constructing my research with the aid of a metaphor. I found this tool slowly emerging as both a boon and a bane in the development of my ideas and how they might be presented and represented. Enabling the flow of writing via metaphor is certainly a benefit when I am seeking a way to break through to a given point, but the resulting text can seem contrived. Thus, I hope to use the metaphor of a search for greener grass with an element of judiciousness, so that it may complement and shape my work here without imposing limitations and uncalled-for convolutions.

It is my intention to manipulate metaphor only to the point where it enables the reader to better understand my expressions. When I feel that the metaphor is becoming burdensome, I plan to cast obscurity aside by revealing the core of my experience in simple terms and describing how it translates to the world beyond my own life. Naturally, no metaphor is perfect and cannot be applied *ad infinitum* without demonstrating respect for the central purpose of

graduate research: to inform an audience clearly and accessibly, and to make a worthwhile contribution to a domain of knowledge.

The search to now

It is interesting to note that when we encounter a new thing, be it a type of food, a book, or a potential topic for thesis work, it seems to surround us wherever we turn. Since I first read the word "hegemony" in my professor's book and began to contemplate how I might go about discussing the spread of English contrasted with multilingualism, I have come across an inordinate number of radio programs, mainstream magazine and newspaper articles, academic texts and an array of other media dealing in some manner or another with the very subject I wish to explore here. I will now sketch a rough map of the various works that have helped me to shape the ideas conveyed in this thesis.

The role of power and privilege in the hegemonic presence of English is central to my story. In interpreting my experiences, I explore the impact of English hegemony, unilateral power and privilege on current trends in learning languages. I use Entwistle's (1979) book as the main basis to explain hegemony, while drawing on other authors to elaborate a theoretical model that juxtaposes hegemony, power and privilege. Loomer (1976) considers two forms of power: unilateral and relational. I analyze Loomer's explanation of unilateral power and investigate how it is supported by hegemony. He defines unilateral power as "the capacity to influence, guide, adjust, manipulate, shape, control, or transform the human or natural environment in order to advance one's own purposes." (p. 14) Kreisberg (1986) substantiates this in his work that contrasts power *over* (Loomer's unilateral power) with power *with* (what Loomer refers to as relational power). In the model I develop, unilateral power, or power *over*, is buttressed by the concept of unearned privilege which, in turn, confers domination upon a certain group in society, as Jensen (1998, 1999) and McIntosh (1998) have shown.

As a counter-balance to the hegemony of English, I explore the possibilities that counter-hegemony presents for learning in relationship with others. Sumner's (2002) work in this area has contributed significantly to an understand-

ing of how we can work in community and take action that seeks to change the *status quo* and loosen the grip hegemony holds on society. Sumner builds a strong case for the creation of communities where people come together to question the *status quo* and are transformed by the relationships of learning engendered by such questioning, leading to the "active resistance and informed agency" (p. 316) of counter-hegemony.

Central to counter-hegemony is the concept of community, which Bennett (2003) and Barber (1999) both examine. Bennett (2003) deconstructs community and looks at it from a variety of different angles, particularly that of hospitality. If communities are to be open to difference and diversity, they must be hospitable and inviting to outsiders. He encourages those living and working in community to "understand the other not in our terms, but in the other's terms" (p. 57). Barber (1999) takes a similar approach and addresses the key role of *imagination* in perceiving what priorities are most important for a community that aims to shift the focus from individual needs and desires to the common good.

The experience of learning in relationship with others and in community harks back to the work of Freire (1970). In *Pedagogy of the oppressed* he underscored the idea that education needs to become a raising of consciousness (*conscientização*, or conscientization) for its learners, in such a manner that the oppressed become aware of their situation and empowered to change it. Freire awakened an understanding of what oppression means and how closely it connects schools and places of learning to society and social balance. He further argued that for meaningful education to take place, teachers and learners must participate *mutually* in what they learn from one another: in the process of education, all are simultaneously teachers and learners. When a community of learners experiences conscientization, change in a hegemonic and oppressive *status quo* can occur.

Connell (1993) focuses his critique on the role that hegemony plays in school curricula and discusses the importance of moving education into a realm that reflects the experiences of the "least advantaged". With this perspective, the education of dominant groups can lead to transformation in the *status quo* that

is normally maintained in society through institutions such as schools. Connell aims to dismantle hegemony by bringing in a curriculum that emphasizes what dominant groups can learn from the dominated, and how a new awareness of hegemony can be raised with this learning.

While education was my starting point, the field of language is pivotal to the theme of this work. My focus for this thesis arose out of a critique of the hegemonic position of English, and I move from an analysis of hegemony to concrete examples of how it plays out in our use of language. I consulted various works by scholars of language to ground my argumentation within the framework of linguistics and language education.

Cummins and Danesi (1990) examine language education in the Canadian context and offer a sharp critique of the "denial of Canada's linguistic resources". They argue that the needs of the linguistically diverse population in Canada are not only neglected by our education system, but are eroded by the ever-present hegemony of English that pervades our institutions.

From an international perspective, Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) has advocated for changes in education that reflect what she refers to as linguistic human rights: "a necessary (but not sufficient) prerequisite for the maintenance of linguistic diversity" (p. xii). Her aim has been to heighten awareness of the injustices in various education systems that encourage linguistic homogeneity by discriminating against minority language speakers with a refusal to recognize the value and role of their other languages.

Skutnabb-Kangas has also collaborated with Phillipson (1995), who has been a strong voice on linguistic issues in his own right (1992, 1997). He argues that the destructive nature of linguistic imperialism has assisted in marginalizing certain languages and allowing others to take on positions of unquestioned power. Phillipson (1992) explores how the business of English language teaching (ELT) has been transformed from a burgeoning margin of international aid, trade and exchange to an industry that has produced a considerable number of trained instructors who attempt to meet the increasing demands of English language students around the globe. In *Linguistic Imperialism* (1992), he tracks the spread of the English language over the past few decades and links it closely

to the expansion of international business and trade that followed the collapse of many colonial powers in the middle of the last century. He uncovers the role that ELT now plays as it works in ways supported by the historical foundations of colonial conquests: first land, then culture and language.

Pennycook's *English and the discourses of colonialism* (1998) takes up and elaborates on concepts in the same vein as Phillipson. Pennycook's notion of discourse and how it is manipulated and deployed in today's politically charged world grew from his earlier work in *The cultural politics of English as an international language* (1994), in which he demonstrates how English has been key in dismantling cultural and linguistic diversity.

Linguists and activists in promoting linguistic diversity have also provided me with many works to consider. Crystal (2000), Dalby (2002) and Dorian (1998) all discuss the alarming rate at which languages are currently being lost and sketch a bleak picture for the future if this loss continues apace. Each touches on the role of English and other national languages that have made it increasingly difficult to maintain linguistic diversity in more remote communities where ancient and indigenous languages are giving way to the influence of North American popular culture and the infiltration of the mass media. Battiste (2000) has drawn from a critical perspective to examine the state of indigenous languages in Canada and beyond. She and other contributors raise questions around how English and other European languages have devastated the cultures and languages of many of the world's non-European inhabitants. They also seek ways to increase and encourage the learning of aboriginal languages as a means to provide the indigenous population with a deeper cultural awareness and direct involvement in their own cultural and linguistic development.

The concepts of linguistic human rights, colonialism, discourse, economic and socio-cultural influences, and the impact of these on language all bring me back to where I started, with a discussion of hegemony and power. The books described here do not constitute a comprehensive list of references – there are other books, articles and pieces I have found that address the issues of English language hegemony, multilingualism and the role that education can play in transforming the current situation in a positive way. I will use these works

among others[1] to build the case for multilingualism in education as a counter-balance to the hegemony of English.

Finding the path

In the next chapter, I examine my earliest experiences of learning languages at home, setting the stage for the school years. In the same chapter, I address the dynamics I encountered learning language in the mainstream school system, specifically in a second language French immersion program in English Canada and later in a conventional, French language school in Quebec. In the ensuing chapter, I sketch my language learning experiences as an adult in various environments: as a native English speaker in foreign language locations, both in Canada and abroad; as a traveller, worker, student and teacher of language, again in Canada and abroad; and finally as an adult member of a bilingual household and a multilingual family. In the fourth chapter, I critically analyze these experiences in light of the concepts of hegemony, power and privilege in language and language learning. Finally, in the last chapter I present the concept of counter-hegemony and learning in community as a way to take action against English hegemony. I highlight the value of multilingualism in education, both in ELT and for native English speakers, and contend that it is indeed a viable option if we are to initiate significant change in the *status quo* and create communities that welcome and learn from linguistic diversity.

Setting out

With the seed of this thesis sown here, I branch out in my search for greener grass and explore avenues that lead me to address English hegemony in the context of my life. By using autobiographical stories, I hope that readers will recognize the connection between our life stories, the world we live in, and the power imbalances that exist therein. I wish to situate myself as a language

[1] The citations used in this thesis are faithful to the authors' original texts and have not been altered, save where I indicate changes in emphasis or errors in typing to eliminate confusion for the reader. All other original spellings or font styles that do not mar the reader's understanding have been retained. On the one occasion I quote from the original text in French, the translation provided is my own.

learner and educator in a counter-hegemonic community open to linguistic diversity and call upon readers to identify themselves in communities of learning in relationship with others. If this can help more of us to make sense of our experience of hegemony and language, and understand the vitality and importance of linguistic diversity in our lives, then I will have accomplished my goal.

CHAPTER TWO:
Germination

Family trees

In one of the last courses I took towards my Masters degree, our class was asked to draw a language-based genealogical tree of our families spanning the past three generations, indicating which languages our family members speak or have spoken. I took this task on with considerable enthusiasm, as I felt there was a rich linguistic diversity in my family that I could tap into. In completing that exercise, I was struck by how languages had been instrumental in forming my family's dynamics, interactions and movement. In this chapter, I wish to first retrace this family tree of language variety and then explore what it meant for me to grow up in an environment oriented toward language learning and diversity. Many of the ideals and beliefs I hold are closely connected to those of my family, which provided me with the possibility of learning various languages. This sketch of my life in a multilingual environment is meant as an example to illustrate how the hegemony of English imbues the experience of language learning.

My objective in this chapter is to emphasize the impact that a variety of languages can have in the formative years of life. Informal education at home and formal education at school are pivotal in defining our world, how we relate to it, and to each other in it. When education, either at home or at school, is compounded by exposure to different languages, new dimensions of self-understanding are brought into the learning process.

This learning process involving other languages is not a simple recipe for becoming multilingual. As a child and adolescent, I struggled to reconcile what I had learned of the world at home in English and Hungarian, at school in English and French, and later when I chose to investigate other languages independently. There is a definite tension in my experience between my desire to learn foreign languages and my preference to settle comfortably into a largely

English-speaking world. This tension arises out of the combination of the family and society I grew up in.

The genealogical language tree of my parents' families is a linguistic blueprint and educational foundation for what my own language learning has become. I begin here with my family's linguistic background and follow with an examination of how my childhood, adolescence and young adulthood were affected by that background. Describing my early life experience through the lens of multilingual learning, I depict the strong influences of linguistic diversity on my life – at home, in school and in my own choices – though I continue to be drawn by the beguiling tug of English language hegemony.

My mother's side

My mother was born in south-eastern Hungary, near the border with Romania and Yugoslavia. The Second World War was a year away from its end and she remained with my grandmother in Hungary until the troops returned from the battlefields around the European continent. Once the family was reunited, my grandfather took his wife and daughter to Czechoslovakia, where his cultural and linguistic roots were. He was a Slovak national who had grown up in south-eastern Hungary. Similarly, my grandmother is a Hungarian national who grew up in the predominantly Hungarian-speaking province of Transylvania, within the political borders of Romania. My mother was born to a couple who collectively used at least three languages as a consequence of the political and demographic movement of the times. Due to the circumstances of my grandfather's involvement in the conflict at the time of my mother's birth, he had also acquired a sufficient knowledge of German and Russian to survive the constant travel and interaction between the fighting countries.

By the late 1940s, the Red Army began to advance across eastern and central Europe and my grandparents decided to flee Czechoslovakia before their lives became threatened by the imminent regime. The first stop was a displaced persons camp in Germany. After they had waited for almost a year to gain passage abroad, with my grandfather growing increasingly desperate to get out of Europe, they were finally able to arrange for tickets on a boat to Canada. At the

time they were to depart, my five-year-old mother fell ill and needed emergency surgery. When the boat left for Canada without his family aboard, my grandfather vowed that they would leave the camp on the next passenger ship, regardless of its destination. The following vessel was set to sail for Venezuela: among the passengers on board were my mother and her parents, looking forward to a new home.

My mother began school in Spanish, her third language. As a pupil at a school for the children of Spanish expatriates living and working in Caracas, she was immersed in the culture and customs of that European colonial power. Interestingly, when my mother and I were having a discussion once about religion and ritual, she found she was able to recite the Catholic prayer of Hail Mary – in Spanish – over fifty years after she had learned it at primary school. Sumara (2002) explains that this also happened with his immigrant mother: "in the last part of her life my mother tried to represent her early experience but, with English, it was not possible to convey the depth of her knowledge." (p. 252) Language is very contextual, and certain words or phrases may be associated with certain times in our lives. While my mother came to Canada early enough in her life to learn English fluently, she was hard pressed to recite Hail Mary from memory in English.

When my mother was ten years old and had lived in South America for half that time, my grandparents made another attempt to reach Canada. They arrived from the tropics on an icy November day and initially settled in Winnipeg. Very soon they decided to cross the prairies and take advantage of the employment boom in Calgary. Among all of the life-altering aspects of immigrating to a new country, the entire family was faced with learning yet another language. My grandparents, and especially my grandfather, embraced English as the language of their new country, for Canada had truly become home to them when citizenship was granted; this was a status they had not been able to gain from any other state they had lived in. Canada and the English language represented freedom and opportunity, a fresh start. According to my mother, my grandfather's English was honed to the point where his colleagues asked him to proofread reports and correct any language errors therein. Despite enthusiasm

for this new language, and unlike some immigrant families who spoke only English, Hungarian and Slovak continued to be spoken at home as mother tongues. The linguistic diversity that had been a part of the family until their coming to Canada was not compromised and both my adolescent mother and my uncle (who was born in Canada) were encouraged to learn languages.

By the time my mother met my father as a university student in Calgary, she spoke five languages, having also learned French throughout her secondary and post-secondary education, and taking it as a minor in her undergraduate degree. Shortly before graduating, my mother decided to take a Spanish class on a whim. She enrolled at the beginner level and found that the first language of her formal education came flooding back. Once her Bachelor of Arts was behind her, she embarked upon graduate studies in Spanish literature in Barcelona. In the late 1960s, Spain was culturally and socially in constant flux and though she interacted primarily with Spaniards, my mother came into contact with other English speakers through a job as an English teacher. What was to become today's English language teaching "industry" – i.e. ESL – was taking root around the globe, and Franco's Spain was no exception. Within a year, my mother was back in Canada: she had begun her Masters degree in Spanish, but decided to return home and marry my father.

My father's side

For his part, my father represents a kind of cultural and linguistic antithesis to the story of my mother's family. Evidence of this is in the much more succinct description of his language family tree, resulting from the fact that there simply was not the same degree of linguistic diversity.

Born in Toronto and having spent most of his years growing up in Victoria when that city was still revelling in the heyday of the British Empire, my father came from solid, upstanding Presbyterian stock. His family cherished their Scottish and British Empire Loyalist heritage with a fierceness. This impassioned attachment was first and foremost to all things Scottish, but where this identity was not easy to define, the more inclusive British cultural preferences reigned strong. My grandparents gave us tartan kilts for Christmas and shopped faith-

fully at Marks & Spencer. On summer visits to Victoria, we children would gleefully anticipate high tea with our grandmother at the Crystal Garden; I also recall being fed kippers and crumpets for breakfast, while special occasions called for haggis.

English was the vital language in my paternal grandparents' home – neatly enunciated, with a vocabulary well stocked from prolific reading. My grandfather was a second-generation Canadian Scot and spoke only English. My grandmother, though her family had arrived in Canada with the British Empire Loyalists in the late eighteenth century, claimed to have grown up speaking Gaelic at home. Nonetheless, my father grew up entirely monolingual. Despite a sojourn in Quebec for his university education, and a foray into the intricacies of Québécois at that time, he continues to function solely in English.

Bridging the gap

In juxtaposing the two sides of my family, I cannot help but laugh. The cultural and linguistic clash between my parents' families must have caused both sets of my grandparents some consternation, as they were each devoted to their respective cultural traditions. When I saw the film *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* (2002), I wept with laughter and a sense of acute understanding. I felt I was watching my own family before me and the childhood memories of sometimes awkward gatherings at Christmas and during summer holidays came back to me in a flash. The brilliant and somewhat melodramatic contrast between the flamboyant and rowdy Greeks (substitute Hungarians in my case) intensely attached to their culture and the demure, almost constipated, WASPs was a caricature that rang truer than I thought possible.

The chasm between my mother's and father's respective cultural and language histories astounds me. I come from two widely diverging language-learning environments that somehow found common ground in, among other things, the education of my siblings and myself. My mother's family was always surrounded by foreign tongues and frequently had to learn languages at various times in their lives as a matter of survival. On the other hand, my father's family was in a far more privileged position and displayed a non-existent linguistic di-

versity. My brother, sister and I have replicated aspects of both these language backgrounds in our individual behaviour: we have become multilingual, but we all remain firmly anglophone, ultimately falling back onto English. I often wonder how and why this has happened.

English in Canada has had a long history of colonial domination over Aboriginal cultures and languages. It has also been in competition with French, the other colonial language in this country. Together, English and French have dominated the many immigrant languages brought here (Cummins & Danesi, 1990). English in the global context has been interpreted either critically as a treacherous grasp strangling other languages out of breath, or promisingly as a long-awaited *lingua franca* that enables a great number of people to communicate with little difficulty. In a sense, my own life experience has proven to be a sort of microcosm of the bigger picture I describe: despite the ample opportunity I have had to learn and use other languages, English has persisted in the forefront of my language skills, knowledge, and understanding. The education I received at home and at school throughout my growing up attests to this phenomenon.

Language in my childhood home

As the first born, I presented an opportunity for my parents to explore ways of bringing up a multilingual child. For as long as I can remember, my mother has had an attraction to most things that sound foreign or appear to have an international flair. Even the choosing of my name presented a challenge to settle the disparity between the ideal tastes and the real locality: my parents (and especially my mother) wished to provide us with more out-of-the-ordinary names, taking from the influences of Spanish, German, or other European languages. Finally settling on Carla, my mother felt that the "correct" pronunciation of what became my middle name – Alexandra – might have been too difficult for the local tongues where I was born. My siblings were christened with names that went even more against the grain of the culturally uniform communities we lived in.

My mother made a concerted effort in the first two years of my life to speak in Hungarian with me. This was fully supported by her parents, who also communicated with me only in Hungarian. Although he was not able to speak the language, my father encouraged my mother to keep her language and a love of learning foreign languages alive in me. Growing up in the interior of British Columbia, our options for learning foreign languages beyond the home environment were restricted. By the time I was old enough to play with other children in the neighbourhood and had spent more time around my father, my mother had two other children to look after and within a few years, our preferred language at home had undergone a metamorphosis. I was fortunate enough to have been the child exposed for the longest period of time to my mother's language; by the time my sister was born, the last of three children, there was precious little Hungarian being spoken. Although my father was glad to hear us speaking foreign languages, the presence of a monolingual English speaker at home was enough to quell the use of Hungarian as a means of effective communication amongst our family. We did not wish to hinder my father's participation in conversation and hence spoke in English when he was around, a pattern which evolved into using English all of the time. It was only on occasion that my mother would break custom in English and tell me something in Hungarian – often to hear me answer in English or in Hungarian that had become a mere pidgin form. My brother and sister, however, were less fortunate with less exposure and did not succeed as children in grasping the fundamentals of our mother's first language particularly well.

Growing up in the seventies at the zenith of Prime Minister Trudeau's bilingual policies, my parents had the opportunity to explore an option not available to them in their own schooling. With French language immersion programs sprouting up in classrooms all over English Canada, my parents considered this alterative for our education. It was a promising offer for parents who wished to take advantage of a program outside the mainstream, especially in smaller towns such as the one we lived in. French immersion education opened a few doors, and certainly our eyes, to the country and the world beyond what we knew.

The French immersion program was welcomed with open arms in our community. In recalling the group of grade three pupils with whom I formed the first class, a distinct pattern surfaces. The majority of the pupils were children of professionals, "white-collar" workers. Although at that age it was difficult to distinguish a difference, we sensed that the outnumbered working-class children were somehow "othered"; we realized they did not fit into our children's interpretation of a privileged, middle-class life. Overall (1998) discusses the implications of being an academic from a working-class background; I can only imagine that attending a French immersion program in a small town where class structure was relatively insular was not unlike being the first person in a working-class family to attend university. For middle-class parents, a program such as French immersion would simply be an extension of the education their children already received beyond the walls of a school classroom. By contrast, to a working-class family, French immersion (similar to university) may seem a more daunting and alien educational alternative. Cummins and Danesi (1990) address this inequality in their examination of the success of other language immersion programs (such as Ukrainian in the prairie provinces) which have a more realistic cross-section of socio-economic status, versus the tendency for middle- and upper-class students to enrol in French immersion:

> An important difference … is that the socio-economic profile of students in the Ukrainian program is similar to that of the school board at large whereas French immersion programs have typically catered to a higher socio-economic group. Thus, the Ukrainian program evaluations suggest that bilingual education is not just for an elite group of students but is appropriate for a large proportion of the school population. (p. 44)

Clearly, language education that offers young learners something outside of the "English only" box must be made available as widely as possible. The question of how the educational prospects of the *entire* population may be improved through multilingual learning is certainly problematic, and there is far from being a viable solution at the moment. If, however, the hegemony of English is to meet genuine counteraction, foreign language programming must become universally accessible so that no group interested in learning another language is intimidated or excluded.

Before I began school, I recall my mother and father would frequently spell out a word or a phrase if they wished to conceal something from us. Similarly, my mother and grandmother would periodically switch languages and use Slovak in my presence if they wanted to briefly discuss something that my ears were not meant to hear. In the same way that spelling and reading opened to me the wonders of words and text, French immersion allowed me to access this same power to manipulate verbal communication in a given situation. I recall a strange feeling coming over me when I realized that I could speak with my grandmother in Hungarian without my father understanding me and then turn around to speak French with my brother or my sister without my grandmother understanding me. How could I speak one language one minute that permitted me to focus on one person, and then turn around the next minute to speak another language that prevented that same person from understanding me? I began to experience the incredible resources that people gain in learning more than one language.

Because we lived in a small town, my parents (and especially my mother) were constantly seeking out opportunities to expose us to the world beyond our community. A number of foreign exchange students came to live with us over the years and I recall the excitement we felt when a new person from a far-flung country came to stay. We were curious to get to know the student when they arrived, though we rarely learned much from them about their homeland or their language. The primary reason many of these exchange students came to Canada and to stay with us was to learn English. They could then use their newly-acquired language skills to further their own educations more effectively, whether in Canada or another English-speaking place, or back home. We rarely learned more than a handful of words, if any, from them and did not recognize the resources that this intercultural contact offered. The novelty of a new person in our home usually did not last long, and we nonchalantly spoke English with whoever was staying with us, never questioning why that language was more valuable or coveted than the languages these people brought with them. Even presented with a situation of "greener grass" such as this, we never cared to learn more than a minimal amount from our international visitors.

As a young child in English Canada, I did not like to be designated an oddity on the basis of the "strange" languages spoken by my family. Language permeated my identity: it coloured the food I brought to school in my lunch, it enabled other children at school to label me the "hyper Hungarian" when I became excited about anything. These situations are amusing now, but as a child I sheepishly felt that beyond the parameters of the French immersion classroom, I wanted to distance myself from cultural difference. I had internalized the view that English really was the best way to express myself and the most important language I would ever need. Consequently, the WASP culture that was attached to English was what I aspired to rather than the lively difference of my Hungarian ancestry. As Keefer (1998) claims, "to be WASP was *de rigueur*" (p. 193). The older I grew in elementary school, the more I preferred to use English, even when my grandmother – the Hungarian matriarch – addressed me. It was only later in my development at school and beyond – as an adolescent in Quebec and then as an adult functioning in Hungarian and German – that I sought out other languages with a real appetite.

My mother had a fear that her children would grow up without the same exposure to languages and cultures that she had had, and I imagine that her fear was fuelled when she heard us consistently reply in English when we would have been capable of using Hungarian. The circumstances in which we grew up were significantly different from those of my mother, seeking refuge as a non-citizen in temporary homelands. We had the good fortune and privilege to be born in a place where it was not necessary to escape, but where comfort bred cultural and linguistic apathy. Though we attended school in French immersion, my mother was eager for us to be even more deeply immersed than the local program at school could allow. The most attractive alternative that she could conceive of was to take us to Montreal, where she and my father had lived before we were born.

My adventures in adolescent language learning

Halfway through high school I moved to Montreal with my mother, brother and sister. At the time we moved away, my parents decided it was best that my fa-

ther stay in BC and maintain his work there. Language was an important part of this choice: my father reasoned that because his French language skills were non-existent, he would not survive long in Montreal. The conditions of my mother's work in that city would enable him to travel and visit us every few weeks. The adjustments in our lives were drastic; we arrived expecting to sample the cosmopolitan lifestyle of an international urban centre and to perfect our French, which had been established (somewhat precariously) in the French immersion program we had attended at school "out west". The culture (and I daresay language) shock was intense.

With the confidence that my grounding in French was solid from having been "immersed" in it, I headed to the first day of school in Montreal with exhilaration. My high hopes were dashed when I rapidly realized that my French simply did not come up to standard in the hallways that resonated with Québécois banter at the inner-city school I attended. For the first time in my life, my English did not help me one iota; if anything, it was a detriment to be an "anglo" in this environment.

During our time in Quebec, René Lévesque died, passing on the torch of the separatist movement he had helped found, and leaving fertile ground for Québécois nationalism in his wake. Robert Bourassa was the premier in power and Bills 101 (the French Language Charter) and 178 were on many peoples' minds. Bill 101 had been in existence for over ten years: it came about under the auspices of Lévesque in 1977 when he had been premier and wished to create legislation that ensured the preservation and promotion of the French language in Quebec (Barbaud, 1998). Elaborating upon certain clauses in Bill 101, Bill 178 was put forth in 1988 with the purpose of clarifying the display of French in commercial places and restricting the display of other languages. I remember discussing the controversial issues surrounding this second bill with my classmates and friends; though we were not necessarily directly affected by commercial legislation, there was a good deal of emotion and interest bound up with the original bill – 101. As a native English speaker in a Québécois school, I was on shaky ground when expressing my opinion: though Montreal is a city with enormous cultural diversity, anglophones in Quebec were relegated to cer-

tain geographic as well as political realms of influence and were not always appreciated elsewhere. Our learning curve in Québécois French and in all matters Québécois was indeed steep.

Though we initially struggled at school, my siblings and I soon incorporated the necessary Québécois accent into our French and were able to become passable members of the groups of young *Montréalais* who made up our social circle. In fact, my cultural and linguistic conversion was so complete that, as a student in CÉGEP, I became a *péquiste* and purchased a membership card for the *Parti Québécois*. There was a close link between the language one used and one's politics. Though I was mildly chided for being an *anglo*, at least I was not from Ontario (the seat of the evil federal government) and I blended in well with the crowd, never dreaming of speaking English with my predominantly nationalist and separatist friends. Often, English was likened by them to a huge ocean in North America, surrounding and periodically inundating the tiny francophone island of Quebec. Once while shopping with a friend in a store, we were approached and offered assistance by a salesperson in English, though he had heard us conversing in French. When we responded in French, he persevered in English and so the dialogue escalated until my friend turned to me in a state of heightened exasperation and exclaimed, "Now do you see why we need *la loi 101*?!"

Even with such a strong engagement with our new language and life in Montreal, we continued to speak English at home. I recall feeling relieved at times that we could "let go" at home in English; other times, I felt as if by using English at home, I had something my friends at school who spoke little English did not have. Regardless of the efforts my mother had made for us to learn other languages, we continued to feel most comfortable in English.

Noteworthy is the evolution our English expression underwent: it became peppered with interjections of Québécois. We would spontaneously exclaim "ben voyons!", "envoy donc!", "j'al sais-tu, moi?!" or any number of similar colloquialisms. Québécois became an alternate way for us to demonstrate emotions we no longer knew how to articulate as readily in English. This subconscious behaviour had been established early in our lives: though our grasp of Hungar-

ian eroded as we grew, we continued to use certain household words only in that language. As an adult now, my language at home is a hybrid of English and German, with words and phrases from Hungarian and occasionally Québécois mixed in. I can observe how this mish-mash has influenced the expressions of my husband, a German speaker who is fluent in English and has learned Hungarian, but has absolutely no inkling of Québécois. I recall the surprise I felt when I first heard him use the vernacular term "boff" (one of the few colloquialisms to cross the linguistic boundary between European French and Québécois) to denote his utter indifference with regard to something. Incredulous, I asked him how he knew this word and he, equally incredulous at my reaction, said that I consistently used it. I should note that although my husband grew up in Europe, he does not associate "boff" (a bastardization of *beau frère*: H. Woodhouse, personal communication, February 2003) with the European French he came into contact with as a youth, but with my Québécois *joual* or slang. It struck me as drolly incongruous to hear him use Québécois when he has had no other acquaintance with that province beyond what I have shared of my life there.

Our young lives in Montreal were shaped not only by what we learned of our new language in school, but also by the neighbourhood we lived in, "the Plateau". Close to Greeks, Portuguese, Hasidic Jews and a wide variety of other ethnic groups, we frequently struck out to explore the sights and shops of St. Urban, St. Laurent or St. Denis streets. Too naïve and too young to realize that this area of the city was a significant breeding ground for artists, writers, and various cultural icons, I wandered along fascinated by the Muslim butcher shops, the Jewish bakeries, and the import shops of assorted goods shipped from distant continents. Inevitably, signs and advertising would be displayed in languages other than French or English (despite the recent inception of Bill 178) and I recall the delight I felt at seeing them, lured by different letters and words, the meanings of which I could only surmise or imagine.

While we resided in Montreal, my mother was employed at a national airline. One of the perquisites of such a position was access to a wide range of flights to anywhere the company and its partners travelled. This was a true

windfall for a family such as ours, who regularly returned to western Canada and treasured the gift of travel abroad. During one summer, it was decided that I would spend the holiday months in Spain with friends of my mother's from her university days in Barcelona. I was excited to go, if a little apprehensive to leave home on an extended sojourn. A solo adventure like this for a sheltered adolescent involved daunting linguistic barriers.

When I disembarked from the airplane in Spain after an eighteen-hour journey, I was welcomed by faces I had known previously only in photographs. Though I was happy and relieved to have arrived, I was nervous about how I would express myself, for my language skills in Spanish were next to nil. It did not take much to set me off: my hosts asked me a question, I struggled to understand and answer it, and then promptly burst into tears. Perhaps I was exhausted from the trans-Atlantic flight or simply had no other way to indicate my sense of isolation by not being able to function in a strange language. I recall the moment with vividness and the sensation of acute terror as the prospect of spending the next two months with a severe linguistic disability washed over me. For an extroverted individual like me, there are few things I can think of more distressing than the inability to express myself. I suddenly understood the catch-phrase "language barrier" with a whole new meaning of sheer insurmountability.

In the end I spent a memorable summer learning rudimentary Spanish, aided significantly by the foundation I had in French. The people I met demonstrated limitless patience with my butchering of Spanish and seemed content to prattle on with me, slowing down when my eyes showed signs of glazing over. That summer was instrumental as my introduction to what it means to be at a linguistic disadvantage. I discovered much about what I hoped to learn in life and how I hoped to go about it. Had I followed my initial instinct and not made an attempt to learn at least some Spanish, my sense of isolation and loneliness would have been exacerbated, and I would certainly not have become acquainted with my mother's friends and their families to the extent that I was.

Three years passed in Montreal. Over those years, my parents had endeavoured to sustain their relationship and the family ties that bound us to-

gether. As wonderful as it had been to follow the dream to live in Montreal and support us in learning French, my mother began to re-examine the life we had had in the west and consider a return there. She periodically made remarks about the more relaxed pace of life and the unmatched climate of the west coast. When I recall the discussions we had in the final months our family was together in Montreal, I find it ironic that though there were a number of reasons for my family to return to British Columbia, one that occasionally surfaced was a concern for the quality of our (and especially my sister's) English. We were certainly capable of using English as native speakers, but as the youngest and most impressionable child, my sister's English had become more strongly permeated by Québécois than had my brother's or mine. Despite the fact that we spoke English at home and maintained contact with family and some friends in English, there was still the issue that some of our language skills in English would suffer. Paradoxically, language had become one reason to leave Montreal, reversing the argument for us having moved there in the first place. English was and is the language with which we communicate most readily in our family (despite the importations of Hungarian and French). English is also the most widely-spoken foreign language in the world. Even if our family had remained in Montreal, we could have polished our English had it been in need of improvement. This linguistic concern was less of a genuine issue and more of a pretext which, when doubt cast a shadow, justified leaving Montreal and returning to British Columbia. Just old enough to remain on my own, I decided not to join my family in the west.

Venturing out alone in Montreal

I continued my studies in Montreal and attended CÉGEP there, a two-year post-secondary program that all Quebec students must complete if they wish to pursue university studies. CÉGEP offers a broad spectrum of areas of study which gives students the chance to explore a specific focus they may wish to pursue. The program I elected to take was an affirmation of the upbringing I had received. With encouragement from my parents, I registered in the International Baccalaureate (IB), a program that existed at the college I attended for both my

secondary and CÉGEP studies. The IB is an academically enriched curriculum offered by a number of institutions around the world, with papers and exams evaluated on a standardized scale and the final certificates approved by a central board. The purpose of the IB is to promote international understanding and respect through the study of "global issues" which are addressed through such fields as history, philosophy, economics, or literature, among others. The irony of this curriculum is the utter lack of education in international *languages*.

When I opted to take the IB, I had hoped that I would be able to broaden my language learning and take classes in a language other than French or English. The official languages of the IB program are English (naturally), French and Spanish. I assume that these are the languages in which students must have a certain degree of proficiency, with English a pivotal requirement. This eurocentric syllabus begs the question of which languages are used, for example, in Asian or African schools that offer the IB. Students in those places must still learn English and either Spanish or French, while those of us lucky enough to take the IB in Quebec have no extra language expectations put upon us beyond what a normal course outline would demand. Ng•g• (1986) addresses this lopsided approach to educating pupils from non-European backgrounds. Why is it that élites in neo-colonialist societies must learn English or the European language of the former colonizer (French, Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, etc.), while those of us in North America and other "developed" countries, have no need to expand our linguistic repertoire in school beyond English, French or Spanish? Disappointed by the restricted opportunities to learn another language in the IB program, I determined to finish without delay and discover where else I might better reach my language learning goals.

Looking to new horizons

With my schooling taken care of, I was not yet ready to continue with university education. I wanted to travel and discover other places in the world. I considered my options and headed for Europe. Looking back now, it is evident that I took the first opportunity to pursue a goal I had longed for while growing up. I departed for Germany, where I hoped to live with and work for a family, while

learning the language there. That country had been a source of cultural and linguistic appeal for as long as I could remember. I do not know how this attraction developed. I recall my parents praising the music, architecture, literature and other cultural achievements of most European countries, but how my youthful sights landed on Germany is still a mystery to me. I cannot recall the moment or the reason that I became so drawn to the desire to learn German, but I sought it out the instant I had the chance. As I contemplate that decision I made years ago, I realize how closely linked it was to my informal and formal education, an education based mainly on the achievements of Europeans. The notion of travelling to Germany harboured the promise of change (I would be away from my own country and forced to learn a language and new ways of living) while not challenging my values, my education or my way of life *per se*. I believe that had I set out for a place where my social well-being and cultural comfort were challenged by the blatant discrimination of certain "rights" I have always taken for granted, I would have had a much more eye-opening experience and probably come away as a more deeply changed young person. But I did not see abject poverty or lack of sanitation or militaristic governments; it was not until several years later, when I travelled outside Europe, that I could appreciate being forced to re-evaluate my privileged life in Canada and the choices I had made because I grew up there.

Arrangements were made so that I could live with a family in Germany and work there as a nanny or *au-pair*, thus enabling me to learn the culture and language, while making a meagre living and hopefully exploring some of the country and the continent. At an age when virtually anything is possible, I had no fixed plans; I merely hoped to stay as long as I could, anticipating months or perhaps even years of fulfilling work, establishing lasting ties with people and immersing myself in this country and language that I had for so long wanted to experience first-hand.

My ravenous appetite for all things German was not to be satisfied in the romantic way I had imagined. My first three months were spent with an Austrian family who lived in Germany, and who were admirable in their tenacity to speak German to me (with a dash of Hapsburg flair), despite their mastery of

English. In exchange for the intense language immersion, however, I was expected to perform tasks not entirely different from those of a Grimm Brothers servant. This particular experience unfairly dulled my enthusiasm towards the culture and language of Germany as a whole. I indignantly left that home for another, barely more rewarding experience of European "nannying" and learning German.

My stay in Germany and my career as an *au-pair* lasted a full seven months. I came away from it with a sense of emptiness and failure. Though I had attained my goal of acquiring a foundation in German (the children I worked with were especially patient instructors), my ideals about Germany, its culture and consequently its language, lay in ruins. With the experiences I had had there, I regarded Germans with their powerful position in Europe in the same light as US Americans in North America: arrogant, forceful and uninterested in the world beyond their own sphere. A disgruntled Germanophile, I had no residual yearning to quench my former eagerness to learn about Germany and its language.

As the first true foray into the outside world entirely on my own, my time in Germany was unlike the summer I had spent in Spain. Certainly, I had had the privilege of adding to my language skills and gaining a deeper understanding of a foreign culture (or as foreign as a European culture can be from a middle-class, Euro-Canadian perspective). But in Spain I felt that I had moved *into* the culture, while in Germany I felt that I had remained on its periphery. Working as an *au-pair*, I had hoped that learning the language would have enabled me to access a deeper level of German culture and society – for the first time in my life, language learning had not brought the gratification and meaningful learning I had come to associate with it.

Returning to Montreal

A new academic year was around the corner and the most comfortable thing for me to do was to return to Montreal and reapply myself to my studies. I opted to continue at the university level in English. This proved to carve my years in Montreal into two separate chapters: secondary school and CÉGEP in French and

the university years in English. Living in Montreal as a quasi francophone thoroughly submerged in a Québécois environment had a significantly different impact on me from living there as a bona fide anglophone attending McGill, an English university that epitomized the culture and language to which the Québécois nationalist/separatist movement was opposed.

Having maintained a few friendships from CÉGEP days, I shared a residence with a francophone friend in my first year of university. This was a reversal of my life from when I had been schooled in a French educational setting: I interacted in English while pursuing my studies at university, and used French at home. It occurred to me that French (or rather Québécois) had become almost interchangeable with English as a language with which I could feel completely at ease. I felt fortunate to be able to maintain my skills in both of these languages by keeping abreast of the personal and academic connections that linked me to each linguistic community.

With little inspiration to declare a major in my first year of undergraduate studies, I enrolled in a broad liberal arts program. One of the requisites that I was more than happy to fulfill was to take credits in a language. The university offered courses in a wide range of languages and I was presented with options I had never before had. Alphabet was the criteria I based my choice on: I wished to attempt a language that used a different method of writing. The Arabic class I initially set my sights on was cancelled due to lack of enrolment and I found myself in the beginner Russian class. Russian was a revelation to me: the complex case structure and unfamiliar characters were utterly fascinating and I looked forward to the homework assignments and early morning classes. I relished the sounds and stories that issued from our teacher during class. By the end of my second year, I had a basic but solid grasp of Russian and wondered how I might continue my studies in the language, for I had ultimately declared a major in art history and would have difficulty in maintaining the time for Russian. In the end, I had to abandon my classes to gain enough credit in art history if I wished to complete my degree on time. Though I was sad to leave Russian by the wayside, it had been such an exciting experience that my faith in

language learning was largely restored after the disappointment that my experience in Germany had been.

As I progressed in my degree, I realized that the strong connections I had had to the Québécois community from before university were slowly growing weaker. In my second year, my brother joined me in Montreal and we shared an apartment. My functional language at home reverted to English, while I established more and more friendships with classmates and acquaintances on the predominantly English-speaking campus. By the time I finished my undergraduate education after three years, I was socializing and interacting primarily in English. I continued to meet with former classmates and friends from CÉGEP, but the time and effort I committed to using French had declined. I also noted a transformation in my attitude toward the (what I felt to be) increasingly confrontational politics of the Quebec government; I was moving in my own political sphere, as I gradually edged away from Québécois and back into an English environment.

When I graduated from university, I recognized that my time in Montreal had finally run its course: I was ready to move on and settle somewhere new. As a disenchanted university graduate, I certainly had no interest in pursuing further studies at that point in time – I wished to learn in a more informal way, at my own pace, taking up topics of particular interest to me rather than in a set curriculum. Once again, I was struck with *wanderlust* and was drawn abroad, to live in and absorb new cultures and, if possible, new languages. I still do not know if this sentiment came from the altered cultural and linguistic circles I was moving with in Montreal, or if I was merely itching to travel and see the world as a young person exploring my independence.

This departure from Montreal was my ultimate leave-taking: I would not return there again. In my later travels I encountered numerous francophones and took advantage of those situations to use French, but I have not lived in a French-speaking environment since that time. After university I found myself completing a full circle as I sought to revive my first language while being immersed in a culture and a place that was unlike anything I had experienced before. I went to live in Hungary, where my mother and her family had origi-

nated: in the intervening years of my CÉGEP and university education, my mother had returned to live there.

CHAPTER THREE:
Cultivation

Hungary I

Until we crossed the border from Austria into Hungary, there was nothing unusual about this trip. Traversing that line, however, was not like moving from one country into another, but more a question of moving through time for me. Suddenly, I was surrounded by a language I had only heard as a child in our kitchen at home or in the living rooms of my grandparents' friends. Beyond the customs booths, I saw a billboard advertisement for ice cream – it was the height of summer – and the words seemed to swim in and out of my consciousness. Then I realized that the words were in Hungarian and I understood with a sudden jolt that this language I had always associated with those closest to me was a language that *millions* of other people spoke; it was a language that constituted the nexus of a nation, a culture and a history. This melding of the strangely familiar with the utterly new upset my finely-balanced awareness of what Hungarian represented as a language and a culture – to me and to the world beyond. I was to face yet another case of culture shock, though very different from what I had experienced in Quebec; this new period in my life would offer me the chance to explore linguistic diversity and English hegemony in a way I never had before.

My mother went to live in Budapest not long after the collapse of Soviet communism in eastern Europe, when Hungary was establishing a market economy friendly toward capitalist trade and technological modernization. After spending a few short years in Vancouver, my mother decided it was time to investigate the entrepreneurial opportunities that her country of birth had to offer. By this time, our original family unit had dispersed and my mother had been living in Budapest for two years. I decided to take advantage of a unique opportunity to spend time in a place that would otherwise have been difficult to ex-

plore in much depth. I came to Budapest with the same spirit of curiosity and discovery that countless re- and expatriates experienced in a kind of reverse pioneer wave to eastern Europe in the early to mid-1990s.

My mother played an instrumental role in the first months of my (re)learning Hungarian. At home, she refused to fall back onto English when I became frustrated at not being able to respond to her in Hungarian; I was put in the rather challenging position of receptionist at her business (I learned especially quickly in this environment) and I began daily Hungarian classes with a teacher my mother knew. These lessons helped me more than I could have imagined: for the first time in my life, the complex grammar and other rules of language use were explained to me. Suddenly, Hungarian was no longer a curious characteristic of my grandparents and my mother: in my mind, it took on a meaningful order and logic of its own.

The people, the history and even the places came alive with the language. I started to learn about the family we still had in and around Hungary – numerous visits and expeditions out of town acquainted me with various generations of cousins, aunts and uncles. Simple weekend journeys became lessons in family history and migration, in local arts, architecture and even agriculture. With my growing insight into Hungarian, I was much more keen to notice behaviour and speech patterns appearing, providing a window into the mentalities and mores of the people and the region.

Complete immersion was yet again proving to be an invaluable occasion for language learning. I had the chance to apply my new knowledge directly in my daily interactions. Informal language instructors emerged everywhere I turned: the people in my mother's office were always ready to correct me when I made an error; I would receive spontaneous lessons in vocabulary during encounters with people at the bank or the grocery store. Despite (or rather because of) my introduction to Hungarian early in life, my usage was very out-of-date and infantile: I did not know the words for "appointment" or "meeting", though I could tell people when I was tired or hungry. Even the greeting I knew from childhood was rapidly proven unsuitable. The only people I had ever greeted in Hungarian were my grandparents and their friends: the old-

fashioned and deferential *kezitcsókollom* (literally, "I kiss your hand") was entirely inappropriate when dealing with colleagues in the workplace or strangers in public.

As time passed and the language revealed itself to me in these daily vignettes, I became deeply aware of how closely linked language and culture are to belief and value systems. Hungarian gave me prime examples in its linguistic structure of gender roles, generational differences, business etiquette, social expectations, and countless other minutiae of life. This link between language and value structure is not restricted to Hungarian, but it became apparent in what had been my first language, now revisited in a whole new light. For the first time, I understood certain habits of my grandmother's and the impact this language has had on her tumultuous life. Many of her traditional perspectives are shaped by her Hungarian vocabulary: when my husband and I were married, my grandmother insisted I refer to him with a traditional term in Hungarian (likened to "my lord") rather than the more banal, albeit modern, word that translates directly to "husband". Of all the members of my mother's family, my grandmother has the least developed skills in English and the most connections to the ethnic Hungarian communities where she has lived in Canada. Once I had been in Hungary for half a year and had a stronger grasp of the language, certain facets of my grandmother suddenly made sense, and our relationship went through a transformation that brought us closer together and enabled us to understand one another much better. I am convinced that this was due to the opportunity I had to learn Hungarian and communicate with her on a more intimate level in the language *she* is most comfortable with. I have been eternally grateful for this gift of language, as I have learned more about the stories of my grandmother's life and have perceived qualities and idiosyncrasies in her that I never had before.

After a few months in Budapest, I had acquired a strong base in Hungarian and had learned a great deal about both the country and the people. At an age when mobility meant freedom, I felt ready to move on and explore other places and cultures. My resources were limited so I opted to travel to Israel and spend some time working there. This would allow me to discover a new area of

the world while not needing to invest great sums for foreign travel: I would be volunteering on a kibbutz and travelling around the small country. Though I hoped to learn a few words of Hebrew, my main goal (unlike previous sojourns abroad) was not to learn the language, but to see a different place and explore a different culture.

Israel

During the six months I was in Israel, I worked for half that time on a kibbutz, a type of communal village traditionally favoured by the first Jewish settlers who came to the region over a century ago. Though residents have their own homes and a degree of autonomy, many activities are shared, such as food preparation, child rearing and education, purchasing of various goods, laundry and other tasks. Kibbutzim have a means of income for economic self-sustenance: usually an industry based on tourism, manufacturing or agriculture. Foreigners (both Jewish and non-Jewish) come from all over the world and are granted permission to stay in Israel if they work as volunteers on kibbutzim, performing any number of tasks from factory work to kitchen duties. The kibbutz where I lived and worked had residents or *kibbutzniks* from Russia, South Africa, the United States, Germany, the United Kingdom, Brazil, Canada, France, Scandinavia, Australia, Poland, Mexico, Romania, Hungary and northern Africa. Israel is an interesting mix of backgrounds: though Hebrew has become the official language of the young nation, Israelis have ties to a huge range of cultural and linguistic roots. I found there was hardly any need to learn Hebrew when I could rely on the languages I already knew. As in most places in the world, English is spoken by many people in Israel and my French, Hungarian and occasionally even Spanish and German served me amply. As a general rule, Jews who wish to spend an extended time in the country learn Hebrew in structured language courses called *ulpan*, but this expectation is not made of non-Jews and certainly not for tourists living there temporarily.

Though I did not feel a powerful desire or requirement to learn Hebrew, I found that there was a special link to the language for people who came to Israel to establish a new life and a new connection to Judaism. Jews from all

over the world learn to speak the language that connects them to their faith more deeply than any other medium. With Hebrew, they communicate with other Jews from different places, deepening their understanding not only of cultural issues, but of any number of relevant concerns.

Hebrew was not the only language used in the region I travelled, which is also home to many Muslim and Christian Arabs. Among the efforts tourists make to endear themselves to merchants in the streets of Jerusalem, it is far wiser to use "globally hegemonic" English when in doubt, than to attempt Hebrew. I believe I would have had a much more profound grasp of the intercultural dynamics and of the internal political atmosphere of the area I travelled if I had had the language skills to discuss these questions with either Israelis or Palestinians in their own languages. Sadly, that was not the case and when I consider these events now, I feel that, while the experience I had in Israel was a rich one, it could have been much richer if I had learned more about the country with at least *some* skills in the local languages.

After I completed my work on the kibbutz, I remained in Israel and travelled to visit various sites around the country. I had hoped to continue travelling to Africa and beyond: the vague idea I had in mind was to work my way around the world (to where exactly was not yet determined), teaching English as I went. It never occurred to me that this assumption – that I could teach English to subsidize my lifestyle of travel and leisure – was in any way flawed because it was based on my privilege of being a native English speaker. No other language provides a privilege of this kind to its native speakers. Ultimately, though, my luck ran out and I was forced by circumstance to return to Hungary and to a somewhat more stable environment from which to ponder my next steps.

Hungary II

Upon returning to Hungary, I did not want to stay any longer than necessary. After the exhilarating taste of *wanderlust* that I had had in Israel, I knew that there was more of the world I wanted to see. My plan was to remain in Budapest only as long as it took me to accumulate enough savings to set out again,

working and travelling as far as I could go. I did not know which line of work would be the most suitable for this plan, but was still contemplating the appeal of teaching English.

I began to search for employment and was repeatedly turned down. Rarely were my language skills a topic of discussion: expatriates were so numerous in eastern Europe at that time that native English speakers were competing for jobs. The fact that I spoke Hungarian had little bearing on the matter, since an increasing number of Hungarians were mastering English, as well as other European languages such as French or German. Russian was relegated to the shadows in post-communist Hungary and other former Soviet satellite countries. In the vacuum left behind after the Soviet retreat from central and eastern Europe in the early 1990s, the United States became the sole political and economic "super-power" and a comparable position was solidified for English amongst the world's languages.

Despite constant disappointment, I persevered in my job search. During one interview, I was asked if I had any acting experience. Somewhat taken aback, I thought frantically that perhaps this may be a potential duty of mine and replied that I had no experience, but that I was willing to learn and to try. The interviewer likely read my thoughts because he jovially explained that this had nothing to do with my application to the position I was interviewing for, but that there was an amateur theatre group in town where I might find some success. Disheartened, I felt I would never find work and reach my goal of departing Budapest. After some consideration of the dramatic but unremunerated offer, I allowed my interviewer to relay my phone number to the theatre group recruiting thespians for their production.

Not long after I began attending rehearsals with the eclectic theatre group, I found work with a Canadian multinational firm, responding to a newspaper announcement seeking individuals who spoke English and French. Interestingly, despite the fact that I was looking for work in Hungary, Hungarian was not a priority. Apparently my other language skills would turn out to assist me in securing employment after all. Countless international companies were expanding into eastern Europe and proficiency in English and other languages,

such as French, provided an élite group with a commanding position for first-draft options in work.

While languages were helpful for non-Hungarians to find work at that time, I believe that subsequently Hungarians have taken on a far more central role in the management of businesses, whether they are locally based or multi-national corporations. Many international companies establishing branches in eastern Europe in the 1990s planned transition phases so that once a business had a solid foundation, the expatriate staff could slowly be replaced by local staff, versed in the company philosophy as well as in the relevant language – most often English, but also a number of other western European languages.

Although the firm I worked at was located in Hungary, the majority of the Canadian (and other native-English-speaking) expatriate employees did not feel obligated to learn Hungarian for the purposes of their work there. By contrast, *all* of the Hungarian employees were expected to be fluent in English, if not in French as well. At the same time, Canadians and other native English speakers enjoyed a much higher status in the company hierarchy. Hungarians were generally left in support staff positions or, if they held jobs that were on a par with those of the native English speakers, they did not benefit from the same level of prestige. I wondered how this innate sense of importance could develop, merely by association with a certain language or a certain culture.

My job was interesting and rewarding, but I needed to remind myself of the original plan to leave Budapest for work and travel abroad. As my situation improved and I came closer to the promise of leaving, my old fears of what I should do resurfaced. My mounting distaste for corporate business suggested that I would not last long in this field. Uninspired, I fell back onto the easiest thing to do: I decided once and for all to equip myself with the necessary certification to teach English. It never dawned on me that my new field of work was in any way related to the corporate world I wanted to abandon. Global economic expansion and the rapid spread of the English language are so narrowly linked that it is often difficult to determine which spawned the other. By the time I stopped teaching ESL, I had become a minute cog in the dynamic ma-

chinery of what is now referred to as a global "industry": the English language teaching (ELT) business.

ELT is an acronym used from both a critical and a sympathetic viewpoint with reference to English language instruction and its worldwide approval. In the context of this thesis, I borrow the term from Pennycook's (1994) discussion of "ELT as a service industry" (p. 164). In it, he clearly illustrates

> an awareness [within the field of English language teaching] of the similarities between international business and the global English market. This tendency to celebrate the market-driven expansion of English as an innocent, technical operation, reducing students to 'consumers', teachers to 'suppliers of a product', and schools to 'corporations', appears to be an increasingly common way in which teachers and applied linguists have been able to take up the global spread of English. (p. 165)

Pennycook explains that when English is seen as a supply-and-demand commodity, "this discourse of the marketplace … fails to acknowledge the complexities and inequalities of international relations and education." (p. 166) In my experience as an English language instructor, this simplistic, business-oriented discourse of ELT was indeed a strong influence upon many of the students, teachers, and management I came across.

By the sheer luck of being born in a place where English is spoken as the mother tongue, I was able to exploit a job opportunity. I believed I would be helping people by instructing English. I hoped to give them the chance to express themselves in another language, thus improving their earning potential and enhancing intercultural communication. I also hoped to learn about the places I wished to travel to, learning the language where necessary, though that was not my goal *per se*. With a knowledge of ELT and an understanding of its broader ramifications, I now realize how the path of English language teachers around the world has been paved by people similar to myself at that time. In a group made up largely of privileged, young (and not-so-young) adults from "developed" English-speaking countries, there are few aims other than to finance travel experiences to far-flung, occasionally "underdeveloped" locales, and little qualification other than an ability to use English as native speakers.

With these visions of travel, work and leisure all rolled into one fantastic employment prospect wafting through my head, I found a school in Budapest

where I could become certified to teach English. I took a month-long intensive course with an assorted assembly of other English speakers from Britain, the United States, Canada and Hungary. Hungarian English speakers were permitted to take the same course that native English speakers were taking, but were only certified to teach English within Hungary and not abroad. This policy is interesting evidence supporting the value placed upon knowledge of English as a native speaker; Phillipson (1992) discusses several tenets of the ELT industry, one of which is that English is best taught by native speakers. He elaborates on "the native speaker fallacy" (p. 185):

> Why should the native speaker be intrinsically better qualified than the non-native? The tenet would hold that this is the case because of greater facility in demonstrating fluent, idiomatically appropriate language, in appreciating the cultural connotations of the language, and … in being the final arbiter of the acceptability of any given samples of the language. (p. 194)

While Hungarian was technically the first language I learned, English quickly outpaced it and became the language with which I am most at ease – I thus count myself among the native English speakers described here.

Language has always been the vehicle with which culture is most efficiently and most effectively disseminated and appropriated (Pennycook, 1994) and my experience has continually demonstrated this to me. Phillipson (1992) explains that the native speaker fallacy predates the more removed and technologically-enhanced methods currently used for learning languages, but I would ascertain that native speakers of English continue to buttress the spread of Anglo-American culture around the world through ELT.

Phillipson (1992) further contends that "the insight that teachers have into language learning processes, into the structure and usage of a language, and their capacity to analyze and explain language, these definitely have to be learnt" (p. 194). It is indeed a fallacy to believe that native speakers possess these skills innately. On the contrary, most native speakers of any language, untrained as language teachers, rarely have the finely-tuned awareness that second or foreign language learners have of correct grammatical rules, syntax, orthography or structure. There are myriad native-speaking English language instructors in the world who have taken no training whatsoever in appropriate language

teaching, but who are elevated to a highly-respected status of authority merely by virtue of speaking English as a mother tongue. Phillipson refers to these types of instructors as "potentially a menace" (p. 195), which they may very well be. As a former English language teacher, I would have had serious qualms about instructing learners with no training in effective teaching methods or an understanding of English and its linguistic intricacies.

During the course of the month I was in training, we took a number of workshops on different ways to teach English. One such workshop was in pronunciation. The interesting power dynamics between native English speakers of British and North American origin was highlighted in that particular exercise. We were asked to drill a number of words with certain sounds: one such combination was the linking of a word ending in "a" with the next word beginning with "a", as in "Canad*a a*nd…". The instructors of the course (all British) claimed that there was an almost imperceptible "r" sound between the respective "a" sounds at the end of one word and the beginning of the next: Canada*r*and. Many of the students were, like myself, from North America; we countered that for North Americans there was no such sound in our pronunciation. After listening closely to our pronunciation, the teachers insisted that yes, there was definitely the sound of an "r" there… it was merely a question of concentration. While I am sure this was meant more as assurance than insistence, I found the British instructors somewhat narrow in their interpretation of what was deemed "correct" pronunciation. This dismissive attitude of upholding a single standard in the language relates directly to English hegemony and the maintenance of domination by English-speaking cultures (Pennycook, 1994).

I find native English speakers' (*not* only British) refusal to learn other languages comparable to this confrontation over pronunciation. This tenacity served the colonial British well, as their own language became the *lingua franca* of the British Empire. The ideological underpinnings that promote monolingualism are in fact related to a traditionally anglophone attitude of intolerance toward bilingualism and multilingualism (Dorian, 1998). Stursberg (2002) corroborates this in his memoirs of British colonialism in Asia:

> My grandfather's contempt for native languages was shared by most of those who laboured east of Suez for the greater glory of

> the British Empire. It was an expression of the racial superiority they felt and that came naturally to them as members of the Raj. Even those colonial officials and police officers who had to acquire some knowledge of the vernacular in the course of their duties looked down on the native tongues as a sordid means of communication. This arrogant attitude of the British toward all native languages (the feeling that they were incomprehensible, second-rate and split up into so many different dialects) and their refusal to learn them had the effect of spreading English throughout the vast extent of the Empire and thus turning it into a world language. (p. 39)

At the time I was taking the English teaching course, my goal was to complete my certification as quickly as possible, so none of these thoughts crossed my mind then – I simply felt mild irritation at not being affirmed in my North American pronunciation. Indeed, I would later be just as firm with my own students as the instructors had been with us in drilling language exercises in pronunciation or other aspects of English. At the end of the month, I obtained a piece of paper that confirmed my new-found status as a teacher of the English language. A sense of freedom overcame me and I felt that anything was possible: I could leave my work in Budapest and go anywhere with this passport to teaching jobs worldwide. As is usually the case with well-set plans, my life did not follow along so simply.

The theatre group I had been involved with earlier had become a central social circle for me. The group was composed of a wide range of students, travellers and other expatriates from India, France, Japan, Germany, Hungary, the UK, the US and Canada. While most of us moved on in our travels, some of us remained in contact. One of the theatre members from Germany returned to Hamburg when his company recalled him. In the age of electronic communication, our correspondence evolved from casual messages to animated exchanges several times a day.

A few weeks after I finished the intensive English teaching program, I left Budapest and set out to travel. I set my initial sights on south-east Asia, as I was particularly interested in Vietnam. There was something intriguing about a place undergoing profound change similar to that of Hungary, as part of the legacy of French colonialism. However, before departing for Asia, I had promised a visit to Hamburg. I never did make it to Vietnam. The next period of my linguistic

adventure would open up to new work experiences and another type of bilingual home life.

Teaching English in Germany

My first employed position in Hamburg was as an English language instructor. I found a job as a freelance teacher for a British firm specializing in "business" English. The vast majority of my students were people who worked for large, multinational corporations and needed English in their workplaces. Many of them had direct contact with native speakers of English either in Britain or in North America, and there were many who used English as a common language to communicate with a variety of other language speakers, primarily across continental Europe or in Asia.

The learners I worked with ranged in their language levels from novice to advanced and they ranged in the corporate hierarchy from shop-floor employees to the upper echelons of management. A number of these people were avid students and would happily begin their day at seven o'clock in the morning in order to attend English class before going to work; others took classes at the end of the day and stayed at work as late as seven or seven thirty in the evening. They were diligent and hoped that it would pay off with promotions in their employment, the prospect of foreign travel and the feeling that they not only possessed a skill, but a whole other persona in English (Edwards, 1994).

In the early days of my career as an English language teacher, I began to understand that I had certain privileges as an English speaker, and particularly as a North American. Phillipson (1992) discusses the unbalanced nature of what he refers to as English linguistic imperialism, which he defines as follows:

> *the dominance of English is asserted and maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstitution of structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages*. Here *structural* refers broadly to material properties (for example institutions, financial allocations) and *cultural* to immaterial or ideological properties (for example, attitudes, pedagogic principles). (p. 47 original emphasis)

I realized that if my students did not have the chance to learn English, they would not be likely to rise in their workplace hierarchies, and may even

have lost their jobs. As a native English speaker, I had never been faced with such injustice. Phillipson (1992) elucidates this point: "the structural and cultural inequalities [of English linguistic imperialism] ensure the continued allocation of more material resources to English than to other languages and benefit those who are proficient in English." (p. 47) Simultaneously, the ELT business perpetuates the belief that in learning English, career advances go hand-in-hand with *economic* achievements and conspicuous consumption, highly valued in western and especially North American societies.

Surrounded by media coverage on American cable news channels and the promotion of American popular culture via movies, music and clothes, non-English speakers take on subliminal desires which are recreated in the ELT classroom. We were often encouraged as teaching staff to use "everyday" items in our lesson plans, such as English-language (usually Hollywood) movies, popular musical hits, and articles from mainstream international (American or British) newspapers and magazines. When my students were given the task of preparing a presentation, they frequently demonstrated the impact these elements of English-language popular culture had had on their understanding of the world and the place that English held in it. The pressure to learn English was strong for my students in Hamburg, as many of their companies were affiliated with multinationals that had their headquarters in North America or in Britain – a direct result of international mergers. Employees were expected to have faith that learning English and wanting to advance economically were the keys to ultimate "success".

Through my students' behaviour and approach to learning, I began to grasp how language goes far beyond a mere form of communication, but is intrinsically connected to thinking processes, belief systems, attitudes, customs and values. I recalled my own experience re-learning Hungarian in Budapest: again, I gleaned the profound relationship between language on the one hand and mentalities and cultural values on the other. As a language learner, the attitude of the people in Hungary was frequently illuminated when I learned a new word or phrase from the language. Hungarian society is very patriarchal and conservative; in listening to how certain groups addressed others (men and women,

youth and the elderly, Hungarians and "racially" non-Hungarian groups such as Jews or the Roma, traditionally referred to as "the Gypsies"), I gained access to a world where I had an insider's view of the cultural dynamics. I found in using the language, I could see how Hungarians thought and felt. Occasionally, I could even be swayed to think and feel the same way. Dalby (2002) explores the differences between *Linguistic Relativity* and *Linguistic Determinism* (p. 266), and how each theory links language and thought processes.

A kind of internalization of the intellectual and social "baggage" that comes with English (or any language in general) was repeatedly demonstrated in the work I did as an English language instructor in Germany and later in Canada. I had an almost imperceptible awareness of teaching not just my language, but my lifestyle: the beliefs, attitudes, customs and values that are undeniably a part of my English persona, steeped in North American culture. One particular business I taught at in Hamburg specifically requested an instructor from North America due to the fact that their headquarters were in the mid-west region of the US and they wished to absorb (allegedly through language learning) an understanding of American culture so that they may better deal with their colleagues in the United States. It is doubtful that employees at the US headquarters invested the same amount of time, energy and money in learning German as my students did in learning English in that Hamburg subsidiary. Because English is the most widely spoken language in the world, the hegemonic implications of this cultural homogenization are very broadly spread.

The effects of the global expansion of English emerged as an overarching theme among the corporate learners I met. The students I worked with in Hamburg were actively participating in bettering their opportunities in the workplace, a workplace where knowing English meant prestige and power. Power relationships are about negotiation: there is a supply of a given service or commodity (in this case, English) and thus a demand in response. Shannon (1995) writes to this:

> To maintain its dominant status, a language has to be associated with political, governmental, economic, and social domination and the consent of the people. Linguistic hegemony is constantly negotiated as a language's dominant status is strengthened or weak-

> ened, as persuasion is more or less successful for popular consent, and as it is resisted. (p. 176)

Shannon's use of the term "negotiate" is ambiguous. I interpret the word to mean a subconscious resistance against, acceptance of or relinquishment of one language in favour of another. Learners and teachers rarely realize what is happening as the negotiation proceeds, as one language eventually recedes to the background while the other moves, unquestioned, to the forefront of cultural and linguistic awareness. In the case of ELT, the process is cleverly veiled by all the attractive "advantages" that come with learning English, which

> assumes a materialistic set of values in which international travel, not being bored, positively being entertained, having leisure, and, above all, spending money casually and without consideration of the sum involved in the pursuit of these ends, are the norm (Brown, 1990, p. 13 in Pennycook, 1994, pp. 177-178).

I might add that when a language is accepted, as opposed to resisted, in the negotiation, the possibilities are destructive rather than merely invasive. Shannon (1995) also claims that "the hegemony of English has the potential power not only to diminish the use and value of minority languages, but also to replace them entirely." (p. 175) In cases where the majority of work correspondence and communication takes place in English (even in non-English-speaking environments such as multinational corporations in Germany, Hungary or elsewhere), this may prove a very real threat to the diversity of languages, cultures and value systems that are different. While English is the main culprit, it is part of a worldwide pattern of linguistic homogenization: "of the 6,000 languages spoken today, fully half are not being taught to children. Within a single generation, we are witnessing the loss of half of humanity's social, spiritual, and intellectual legacy." (Davis, 2002, p. A11) With the increase in uniformity, we not only lose linguistic and cultural diversity, but the immense array of knowledge and capacity for expression that comes with it.

In addition to the work I had as an instructor to large companies in Hamburg, I tutored a number of private individuals. These people's educational needs varied widely from those whom I taught in the workplace. One young student hoped to become a translator and interpreter, and felt that English was the most desirable language to perfect in that profession. The European Union,

as an example of other international organizations around the world, is a hotbed of translation opportunity. Though French was initially the official language of the EU headquarters in Brussels, English has slowly and stealthily taken over as the preferred, albeit unofficial, language for communication (The galling rise of English, March 1, 2003). Another student was an avid reader and wished to access the classics of English language literature. What inherent worth do these works have in comparison to literary classics of the world's other languages? This was not a question that occurred to me when I was teaching in Germany. But I continue to ponder it today.

My students were not the only ones learning a different language while I was in Hamburg. I was becoming reacquainted with the elementary German that remained from my earlier stay in Germany as an *au-pair*. Because my work teaching English did not offer me the chance to practice German, I did not have to learn a great deal more than I knew beforehand. What my second stay in Germany did provide was a completely different environment in which to learn about the culture and language: my attitude transformed as I felt increasingly relaxed and less negative toward the country, the culture and the people I met.

Within a year of my arrival in Hamburg, my friend from the theatre group in Budapest had become my spouse. While we lived in Hamburg, most of our friends were German-speaking and our social life outside our home was mainly carried out in that language. I was relieved that few of these people wanted to speak English with me. Our home was the only exception: because my husband used German at work all day, he was glad to come home and shift his focus to English. This did not present a problem: living in Germany was enough of an immersion for my learning curve, and I felt happy and more at ease in the language than before. When I was at work but not teaching, I had the chance to speak German with the school staff as well as French or Spanish with other language teachers, which was always enjoyable. I did not feel that I had sacrificed any of the linguistic diversity that I had come to appreciate in my previous job in Hungary or in the international community there.

Not long after we married, my husband began the process of applying for immigration to Canada. We faced many changes in our lives with a new country, a new city, and new work, as well as a new language around us. In many ways, this was a turning point for our understanding of what language meant in our lives: my husband spoke fluent English but had never lived and worked in a native-English-speaking environment. For my part, teaching English in Canada would push me into new situations that would make me think differently about the career path I had chosen.

Teaching English in Canada

The most obvious place for us to settle upon arrival in Canada was Vancouver. It was in BC that I felt I had the most solid roots, and Vancouver was a large centre where the possibilities for work appeared more abundant. Vancouver also had a thriving ELT "marketplace". In the true sense of that word, the city offered a huge variety of schools and courses that dealt with everything from specialized language to basic instruction and preparation for post-secondary education in English.

Because it lies on the west coast of Canada, across the ocean from Asia, Vancouver enjoys a particularly strong following among students of English from other countries around the Pacific Rim. Upon arriving in the city at the end of the 1990s and embarking on my job hunt, I was told by a number of individuals who worked in the area of ELT that "numbers were down" due to the recent economic crisis in Asia, denoting that students had ceased travelling to the west coast to study English and immerse themselves in North American culture. There was a great deal of concern at the time that the economic downturn in Asia would "spread", pestilence-like, to Canada via the west. It was remarkable how much overlap there was between the intersecting spheres of ELT and global economic expansion or recession.

Finally, I found work in a small school that catered to a wide spectrum of students, from well-to-do internationals visiting Canada temporarily to refugees and immigrants. In Vancouver, there was a different classroom atmosphere from that in Germany. If the students wanted to converse with people from a differ-

ent country, they had no choice but to speak English to one another. Recalling my training as an English language teacher, I knew that it was vital to *only* use the "target language" of English with the learners under all circumstances. It was not until much later that I realized how much this devalued and disrespected the linguistic diversity (Auerbach, 1993; Pennycook, 1994) in the school. Without the support of their first language skills, many students were disempowered in their learning (Auerbach, 1993).

This dogmatic maxim of monolingualism was taken to a new level where I taught in Vancouver. Even before entering the premises, the visitor was greeted with a sign on the door: DO YOU WANT TO LEARN ENGLISH OR WASTE YOUR TIME AND MONEY? SPEAK *ENGLISH ONLY!!!* In retrospect, this message on the door – that was also scattered throughout the school – seems coldly mercantile to me, and utterly lacking in encouragement and motivation to learn English for the sake of learning. Students were inevitably left with the impression that they would only get their money's "worth" by speaking exclusively in English. Needless to say, a respectable number of the international students were studying English for the express purpose of increasing their marketability either in the work force of their home countries, or by attending an English-speaking university – the ultimate stamp of educational approval. Learning English was an investment for them – an investment that would hopefully have tremendous turnover. Naysmith (1987, in Pennycook, 1994) underscores this "central place the English language has taken as *the* language of international capitalism." (pp. 21-22 original emphasis)

By the same token, the directors of the school were far more concerned with "keeping numbers up" than with the quality of language education they provided to the learners. They identified each potential student as a source of income rather than a person to assist in improving themselves through education: "language schools are not set up in order to further learning but rather to ensure an adequate profit margin" (Bamforth, 1993, p. 2 in Pennycook, 1994, p. 165). There is a reciprocal exchange between the ELT industry and the motivation for non-native speakers to learn English. Course offerings in ELT ignite motivation while the money rolling in from learners fuels the industry with an al-

most mechanical smoothness. Both elements – the industry and the motivation to learn – are imbued with the values of commercialism and competition that necessarily tie in to "modernization" and consumerism, which are in turn staple values in North America, dominated by the hegemonic position of English.

The internal motivation of learners to better themselves in learning a language for the sake of learning is heavily obscured by the external motivation of a higher income, more prestigious employment, and access to a wider range of mainstream media and information from the "developed" world. Similarly, native English speakers have little or no such external motivation to learn languages other than their own mother tongue. Pennycook (1994) points to the fact that "a crucial aspect of the discourse of EIL [English as an international language] is the view of English and English language teaching as developed, modern, efficient and scientific." (p. 159) With these characteristics ascribed to English, why would anyone want to learn another language, merely for the sake of edification?

While I was teaching English in my professional life, I was becoming better acquainted with German at home. After moving from Hamburg to Vancouver, I noticed a distinct change in the way that my husband and I used language: our use of German increased and established itself as an alternative to the regular flow of English. As in my childhood, I found myself surrounded by bilingualism at home.

Bilingualism at home

Living with different languages around me has never seemed unusual. Growing up with Hungarian and French was simply taken for granted: I did not always acknowledge my situation in a positive light. If anything, my attitude reflected that of my peers and the North American, predominantly English-friendly environment I was surrounded by as a youngster. I was aware of public rhetoric, that knowing more than one language was a resource, a very important "tool", be it in the work force or for educational purposes. With time, I realized that this was lip service rather than genuine sentiment and that the actions of the English-speaking mainstream were not faithful to this rhetoric (Cummins &

Danesi, 1990; Fishman, 1976). There has been a drastic fall in bilingualism (let alone *multi*lingualism) over the past two decades in Canada. This is reflected in the cutbacks experienced by language programs across English Canada – French immersion among others – and the increasing importance attributed to other academic fields such as mathematics and science.

Moving to Canada from Europe changed the relationship my husband and I had to our respective languages and the way we used them at home. As partners in a bi-national and bilingual relationship, there is a certain tension about decisions concerning where we live and which language to speak. No matter the location we live in or the language we use, the question of the other homeland or the other language is always present. Indeed, living in such an environment, the "other" is ever-present and perpetually grants us the opportunity to re-examine ourselves, without forgetting that we are also the "other".

Over the years my spouse and I have spent together, our language use has moved from consciously communicating in English only to an unconscious melding of our two mother tongues, never adhering strictly to one or the other. Naturally, our surroundings have had a part to play in this evolution. In contrast to the conditions in which we lived in Germany, the tables were turned when we moved to Canada, as English became the language of our lives in public, either through work or social interaction. But we did not react by suddenly speaking German at home all the time.

As an adult who has learned languages from an early age and is married to someone who is a native speaker of a different language, I consciously try to embrace and use my husband's language as much as I possibly can. Growing up in a home with parents from different language backgrounds, I learned very early on the importance of knowing my spouse's native language, should it not be the same as mine. Recalling the linguistic barriers between my father and his in-laws, I am grateful that I can communicate with my husband's parents, who speak only German. Ideally, I would like to have the impeccable grasp of German that my husband has of English. Despite my desire to speak as much German in our home as possible, we do not use it in anything like the manner I hold as an example. More than any other factor, agreement by both of us to

speak and nurture each of our languages is necessary if we are to commit to a truly bilingual home life. This is certainly not as simple as it sounds.

When discussing topics related to current events, or to our studies and professional work, we revert to English as the medium of communication. As Gilyard (1991) suggests, "using language as a way of adapting to situations and, to some extent, as a means of defining and controlling situations" (p. 40) is a large part of the way language choice is negotiated in our home. My spouse feels much more comfortable expressing himself in English when engaged in an animated discussion involving complex connections to other concepts. For him, English is more open and fluid as a verb-based language, lending itself better to developing longer, on-going thoughts. By the same token, I prefer to use English in a more spirited atmosphere, as I feel I can follow the flow of conversation better, without pausing to ask the definition of a word I may not know or stalling to search for the German equivalent of a word I wish to use. I feel I can "hold my own" in English, while I feel much more vulnerable in speaking German to a native German speaker, especially if the subject matter we are pursuing is particularly complex.

When my husband and I met in Budapest, we were part of a larger group who gathered together and used English as the common language. Consequently, the first two years of our relationship was conducted almost entirely in English. In Budapest, this was usually the case both at home and in public while later in Hamburg, we spoke exclusively in English at home because the majority of our socializing outside the home was carried out in German. Slowly, after we came to Canada, we began to use more and more German at home, perhaps in reaction to our complete immersion in English. However, my husband claims that English remains the most natural language for him to use in prolonged conversation with me because it was the language we used as our acquaintance with one another grew.

By contrast, German plays the role of a logistical language of planning for us at home. When we are negotiating scheduling issues and deciding which responsibility each person will take as a contribution to the running of the household, we use German. At the table, when we begin a meal, we always say a ta-

ble grace in German. This may be for a variety of reasons: we began the tradition of table grace in Canada, when we had begun to use more German at home; it was an idea of my husband's and it was revived from the customs of his childhood in Germany, not mine in Canada.

German is deployed in a much more playful fashion than English, the language we use for "serious" talks. Not unlike the social languages and encompassing "Discourses" that Gee (1996, 2001) elaborates upon, our use of German at home is intimately connected to the context of our speech and the topic we are dealing with in that speech. As Gee (2001) explains, "immersion in meaningful practice is essential. Social languages and genres are acquired by processes of socialization" (p. 719). Over a period of years, my husband and I have learned to use German under certain circumstances, while English has endured under others. To alter the habits of language choice in our home would necessitate time and practice, and the modifications would not likely be consciously made. This also relates to Gilyard's (1991) explanation of defined and controlled situations; as long as we use one language as opposed to the other, we feel that the situation is being defined within given parameters.

Sumara (2002) recounts how language delineated certain personality traits amongst his family members. German is the language in which my spouse can teach me about himself and demonstrate certain aspects of his personality that he may not be able to share in English. Since coming to Canada, my husband has had the chance to re-evaluate his linguistic and cultural identity. The region where he grew up has become closer to his heart than the political boundaries of the country: he claims to feel much more Bavarian than German in terms of his "nationality". With this Bavarian identity, and through the medium of Bavarian dialect or language[1], my husband expresses himself in ways that I would not otherwise perceive, in English or even in German.

While I do not enjoy the vulnerability I sometimes feel when using German, I do relish the apparent strength I experience when exercising my linguistic skills and pushing myself to excel in them. When my husband and I try to conceal speaking of others in their presence by switching to German, we are

[1] See Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000, on dialect versus language.

leveraging power in our favour. More than merely a surreptitious camouflage, this is a "display of verbal ability" (Gilyard, 1991, p. 40). Using a different language merely to exhibit our multilingualism or to commit mischief is naturally not a laudable end. This power is not wholly nefarious, though: we do not speak German exclusively to discuss others in our presence; we also enjoy conversing in German for the mere pleasure of not always speaking one language. Shannon (1995) gives a detailed account of a bilingual classroom where "everyone is a second language learner" (p. 196) and bilingualism is equated with a positive power to access different worlds through language. If more people were able to speak more languages, I do not believe I would feel the same sense of guilt from manipulating the power of another language in the presence of monolingual English speakers.

As an immigrant, my spouse holds many of the same principles and ideals that my grandparents held when they immigrated to Canada half a century ago; English represented a new life in a new place for them, as it does for my husband. For me, English is associated with nothing novel or exciting. However, my husband did not grow up as an English language speaker in Canada and did not have the opportunity to apply his knowledge of foreign languages until he was an adult living abroad. Now, as a newcomer to this country, my husband wants more than anything to integrate into Canadian society and not be immediately identifiable by his accent. However hard I try to explain that Canada is, by virtue of cultural and linguistic diversity such as his, a truly heterogeneous society that one cannot integrate into, he is adamant in his appreciation of what is inherently Canadian versus what is decidedly German (and not always as deserving of his appreciation). Since the Canadian and the German are not and cannot be mutually exclusive, a type of hybrid identity (Lomsky-Feder & Rapoport, 2000) results, straddling the two places and cultures that are part of who he is now.

This includes the issue of language use. Contrary to the experience of his final year in Germany, where my husband was glad to distance himself from German and speak English at home, he feels no need to "escape" from his daily language here in Canada and substitute a second language at home. Clearly his

attitude toward English is quite different from that toward German. I cherish our bilingualism and ardently wish we spoke more German, for even in Canada it remains the lesser language at home. Paradoxically, another part of my consciousness savours the safety net of English and is grateful for that ever-present alternative.

In our use of spoken German and English at home, we have developed a personalized mish-mash that can be virtually incomprehensible to outsiders. Having grown up in a bilingual environment, I have long been accustomed to throwing a foreign (usually Hungarian) word into an English sentence. Amazingly, like the word *boff* from my Quebec days, my husband has appropriated these words into his own vocabulary and uses them with equal ease. Our linguistic amalgamations reflect a fragmented cultural and linguistic identity, similar to the experience that Sumara (2002) described in his family.

The fact that our bilingualism is restricted to a home environment ensures that we maintain a loose grip on the standards that are imposed. However persistent we may be in speaking German, we live in western Canada and each time the phone rings or we leave the home, English takes over. Even in a bilingual home, one language eventually prevails. In my experience as a child and as an adult in a bilingual home in Canada, that language has been English, no matter what effort is made to counter its force.

Moving ahead

In this chapter I have described the nature and occasions of my language learning experiences as an adult in different contexts: as a traveler, a student and teacher of language, and a family member in a bilingual home. Continuing from the previous chapter, which outlined my experiences as a child and an adolescent, I wanted to illustrate here the transformation that took place in my adult awareness of English language hegemony and multilingualism. I believe that a profound change occurred in my consciousness and understanding of the relationships between various languages as I moved from the sheltered environment of youth to the more independent and exposed life of an adult. Naturally, I cannot pinpoint where and when such a change happened. But as I reflect on my

my work in an English-dominated company abroad, taught English as a foreign and a second language both abroad and in Canada, and as I recall the vulnerability of being a language learner myself, I realize how fortunate I have been to learn languages other than English.

In my own way, I have tried to maintain some semblance of linguistic rebellion by attempting to learn other languages. How successful this has been remains uncertain. But I am convinced that if I wish to understand the world in a more open manner, I cannot rely exclusively on English. As an adult, my life at home has been a close reflection of the way I was brought up, immersed in more than a single language. In contrast to my past work as a teacher promoting the benefits of English, my life at home has evolved into an exchange of bilingual give-and-take. It is something I have referred to in the past as a "duet", a piece that would not exist as a functioning whole if the two parts that comprise it did not support each other in linguistic symbiosis, keeping us alive in the creativity of language.

As I stated, the stories here are instances of language learning in the face of English hegemony. I do not wish to claim there is one way that is a satisfactory panacea for all involved in the learning process (Delpit, 1988). My hope is to raise questions and bring readers to a new place in their awareness of the cultural and linguistic diversity around them.

The following two chapters will provide an in-depth analysis of what I have described in the last two chapters. By distilling the essence from these accounts of language learning in my life, I aim to illustrate and analyze the impact of English hegemony on a broader scale, and then discuss what can be done to counter-balance escalating power imbalances. In the next chapter, I reveal the detrimental impact of hegemony, unilateral power and privilege by maintaining the dominant status English enjoys. In the final chapter, I argue for ways we need to rethink the role of education in building counter-hegemony (Sumner, 2002) in communities of learning, where a firm commitment to the common good inspires us to remain open to others and learn from their experiences. With this openness and acceptance we may move into a new way of being

where multilingualism, rather than English dominance, is a normal part of living with and honouring cultural and linguistic diversity.

CHAPTER FOUR:
The other side of green

Returning to the roots

This thesis arose out of the key concept of hegemony. The hegemony of English and its impact on my own learning and use of languages is central to my narrative. In this chapter, my stories of language learning will be examined through the lens of hegemony and the related concepts of unilateral power (Loomer, 1976) and privilege. All three are pertinent to my experience, as each concept illuminates different aspects of my story.

Hegemony, unilateral power and privilege intersect to create shared areas of relationship and common ground. The connection between them is illustrated by a Venn diagram in Figure 1:

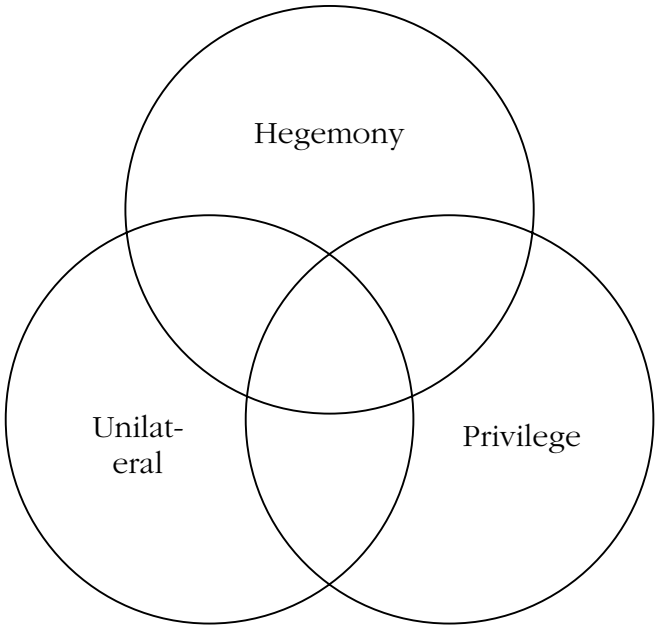

Figure 1: The interrelationship between hegemony, unilateral power and privilege

Hegemony is a kind of power, influence and control based on persuasion rather than the overt use of force. Such persuasion is largely *accepted* and relies upon the "false consciousness" (Entwistle, 1979, p. 12) of dominated groups. Hegemony remains imperceptible, as instruments of culture and education help to maintain ongoing control over the psyche of the majority: "it operates *persuasively* rather than coercively through cultural institutions – churches, labour unions and other workers' associations, schools and the press." (p. 12, emphasis added) Because of its institutional nature, hegemony leads us to believe "that the pressures and limits of what can ultimately be seen as a specific economic, political and cultural system seem to most of us the pressures and limits of simple experience and common sense" (Williams, 1977, p. 110, in Entwistle, pp. 12-13). Williams' quotation highlights the economic and cultural injustices hidden by hegemony: seldom do members of society ask why certain patterns are followed in consumerism, or why historical perspectives outside the mainstream (predominantly white, middle-class, male) are not taught in schools. We are socialized to believe that we have little choice in determining the way our daily experiences unfold and that it is pointless to contemplate alternatives.

It is important to remember that hegemony is a fundamentally *human* phenomenon, and to beware of ascribing agency to hegemony, as if it has a will of its own. Human beings create the institutions that uphold hegemonic assumptions and beliefs in society and human beings are responsible for determining (not always on a conscious level) what is deemed "common sense", as Williams describes above.

It is, for example, "common sense" that English is the most important language to learn, as it is the most widely-spoken language around the world, and it is simply accepted that English will be used in places where many foreigners congregate and interact (international conferences and tourist destinations, for instance). It is also accepted that most people around the world wish to learn English so that they may participate in and learn more about the culture associated with English through its media, literature, or popular icons. As long as

other linguistic groups accept the hegemony of English, the expression of their own distinctive needs will be suppressed.

Hegemony overlaps with unilateral power when persuasion becomes *unacceptable* and gives way to force so as to achieve control over the majority. Unilateral power involves the ability to "influence, guide, adjust, manipulate, shape, control or transform the human or natural environment in order to advance one's own purposes" (Loomer, 1976, p. 14). It differs from hegemony in that it may be "*coercive or* persuasive in nature" (p. 14, emphasis added). Dominant individuals or groups objectify others as instruments by which to achieve their own goals. This type of power is prevalent in western, capitalist culture and though it is characterized by coercion as well as persuasion, it is seldom questioned as a form of domination. The intimate connection between speaking English and achieving financial success is evidence of how the unilateral power of profits in capitalism is transferred to the English language. When non-English speakers see the economic results of learning English, such as higher-paying jobs and ready access to a consumerist lifestyle, they feel pressure to conform. This pressure is coercive if non-English speakers feel they have no other options to make a meaningful life for themselves and their families.

Hegemony upholds the position of certain groups in society, while unilateral power allows them to objectify dominated groups to achieve their goals, both proffering privilege to these dominant groups. Privilege is characterized by unquestioned and unearned advantages that certain individuals or groups enjoy. These advantages are not the result of any particular effort or merit, but accrue to those who belong to a specific group, be it defined by gender, race, class, ability, or in the case here, language. Like hegemony, privilege is not often questioned because it is upheld institutionally. Affirmative action programs are an attempt to counteract privilege, so that education and employment opportunities may be more equitably distributed. But opposition to affirmative action showcases the particular groups who benefit from privilege, who are not willing to admit they have it, and are not prepared to relinquish it through such programs. Native English speakers benefit from "English privilege" each time they travel to other countries and expect to find work teaching English to local resi-

dents, with no training beyond the supposed "expertise" they have as native speakers of the language. Privilege confers a certain type of domination, permitting dominant groups to offer "opportunities" to dominated groups to learn the English language, for instance. This results in these groups becoming closely aligned to dominant groups, rendering "them" more like "us".

The hegemony of English ensures that those who speak it as a first language are privileged and can exercise unilateral power to attain goals that promote the use of English and the culture associated with it, thereby undermining the importance and relevance of linguistic and cultural diversity. The common ground of the Venn diagram where all three concepts intersect is that of domination and the objectification of others to achieve *individualistic* goals. Hegemony persuades members of society to subscribe to the hierarchical *status quo*, while unilateral power forces people to adhere to this subscription when they may not be so inclined and finally, privilege confers dominance upon groups in society that aim to achieve their own goals by exerting their unilateral power – goals that perpetuate their dominant status and maintain the *status quo* of hegemony. These three concepts and the relationships among them deserve a more lengthy discussion, especially in their connections to my own experience of language learning and teaching.

Hegemony and language

Cultural and educational institutions transmit knowledge and norms which are accepted, by and large, by the majority of people as "common sense". This is what is meant by hegemony. By means of embedded value systems, dominated groups are persuaded that maintenance of the *status quo* serves their best interests (Entwistle, 1979). Common sense means accepting the current state of affairs as meeting the needs of everyone in society, including the dominated, or "subaltern", groups (Entwistle, 1979; Gramsci, 1992).

When discussing hegemony at the beginning of this thesis, I approached it from a linguistic perspective. Hegemony, of course, affects far more than language. It is present at many levels of society, reflecting the unequal distribution of resources according to race, gender, class, ability, age, sexual orientation, and

many other groupings. I have largely restricted my investigation of hegemony to the role it plays in how the English language (and, specifically, English monolingualism) has spread around the world as part of a broader economic, social, political and cultural shift. As was noted in the first chapter, the curriculum in both the K-12 and post-secondary education systems promotes the homogenization of language (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000) and the hegemony of English. In some of the most drastic cases, students are violently forbidden to speak their home language or mother tongue in school; in other situations, more subtle but equally destructive policies in the system prevent educators from giving the proper validation and support to students who are multilingual and bringing other languages and perspectives into the learning environment.

In English-speaking Canada, most members of society attend school and have access to the media, both of which support English as the most important language in the world today. English is needed to access public programming, the education system, the mainstream news media and the popular culture of music, film and television. Canada is one example of many countries colonized by Britain, thus introduced to English hegemony, that continue to reproduce this linguistic and cultural hegemony. Via the cultural and economic influence of *neo*-colonial institutions from the United States (as well as the United Kingdom), the hegemonic status of the English language has been upheld and internalized by a majority of people around the world. They have been persuaded to learn English in the belief that they will gain access to English language media, business and educational opportunities.

Even for those of us lucky enough to learn other languages, English monolingualism eventually prevails as the best way to achieve economic, political and social success. Pennycook (1994) draws from Ndebele (1987) to support this view that English produces and reproduces élites who consistently profit from knowing that language:

> 'teaching [and learning] English as a second or foreign language is not only good business, in terms of the production of teaching materials of all kinds … but also it is good politics.' (p. 63). Given the connections … between English and the export of certain forms of culture and knowledge, and between English and the maintenance of social, economic and political élites, it is evident

> that the promotion of English around the world may bring very real economic and political advantages to the promoters of that spread. (p. 22)

These "élites" are mostly people for whom English is the first language. However, a large number of non-native English speakers are convinced that by learning English they will enter the inner circle of those with "very real economic and political advantages".

Hegemony and my own language learning

I can thread the theme of hegemony through my own language learning. As a child at home, I discerned the power of languages in the dynamics that played themselves out between my parents and in the linguistic education of my siblings and myself. My multilingual mother had (what appeared to me) an enormous array of words and tongues to select from. As a young child, she represented everything foreign, or what I later defined as "European". She was quite different from my English Canadian father, friends and others I knew who spoke only English. This difference had positive facets, in that my mother could communicate with me and with others who spoke Hungarian, French, Spanish or Slovak. I enjoyed her ability to use languages easily and listened with a sense of enchantment when I heard my mother speaking another language I could not understand. But this was nonetheless a *difference*, highlighted by the fact that my father could not communicate with me in any language other than English.

When I began at an early age to socialize outside our home in British Columbia, I realized that the only language that would serve me in any useful capacity in the "outer" world was English. When I learned to read and write as a primary student in school, the words we studied were all in English. I recall doing an activity in grade one about pets. At the time, our cat had a Hungarian name: as soon as I had completed the prescribed drawing and had penned our cat's name underneath, I realized that this name did not fit with the letters and corresponding sounds we had learned to produce in English. I concluded that this ineffable difference should be downplayed in order to meet whatever expectations my family, teachers and society put upon me. I was certainly not coerced into using English to the exclusion of the other languages I knew: I simply understood, in a pre-verbal realm of my awareness, that my best interests

understood, in a pre-verbal realm of my awareness, that my best interests were served by communicating predominantly in English.

The hegemony of English was reproduced in our home environment when we as a family increasingly spoke English rather than Hungarian, even when my father was not present. In Quebec, we were immersed in Québécois French and clung to English almost as a life-support at times. Sénéchal (1987) corroborates this with findings that indicate native language preference inevitably surfaces in the home. For this reason, I do not consider myself a native Hungarian speaker, but a reluctant native English speaker. Consequently, as an adult, I feel most comfortable and relaxed when I am able to speak, write and read in English. This causes me to reflect on the hegemony of English that permeates my life to this day, especially since I have the opportunity to speak exclusively in another language with my spouse at home. The fact that this thesis is written in English, to obtain a university degree in an apparently bilingual country, speaks volumes to the hegemony of English that has overridden the hundreds of immigrant languages and cultures that have been brought to Canada. The fact that this thesis is being written in English in a province where several aboriginal languages once thrived before colonization by Europeans vastly diminished their importance (Battiste, 2000) is also a testament to how deeply-ingrained and hegemonic English monolingualism has become in the collective psyche.

These are the realities of English hegemony in terms of my own life. There was a time when I believed English served my best interests. I now feel called to question English hegemony. My linguistic abilities are such that much more effort would be required were I to write a thesis in any of the other languages I know. When I consider how many students I have met from non-English-speaking nations studying in Canada at the graduate or undergraduate level, I marvel at their commitment to master another language, for I know what barriers they face. When remembering the pupils of English I taught in Germany and in Vancouver, I recognize the power of English to advance their economic, educational, employment and social opportunities. As a native English

speaker, I have the luxury of speaking English only and contributing to its insidious hegemony here in Canada, and ultimately around the world.

Hegemony spills over into the domain of unilateral power (Loomer, 1976) when its capacity to persuade subjugated groups is no longer effective. Unilateral power is characterized by its dominant nature, which coerces others, using the threat of brute force to achieve the goals of dominant individuals or groups. While hegemony works "much more subtly … than is often supposed" (Entwistle, 1979, p. 12) through cultural and educational institutions, unilateral power is outright hierarchical, and is the norm in "modern" or "advanced" cultures. When dominant groups cannot use cultural power to persuade others of their rightful place in society, they may use unilateral power to ensure their goals are attained.

Unilateral power

This discussion of power describes it as *unilateral* (Loomer, 1976), a scarce commodity, to be competed for in a system that relies on the threat of violence at a number of levels: emotional, intellectual and physical. In western societies, power has often been associated with force as a means to achieve one's ends; it is traditionally linked to a dominant individual or group's ability to effectively influence others in order to attain their own predetermined goals. As a relationship built upon domination (Kreisberg, 1986), power is perceived as scarce: only a select few have adequate access to it and what little remains of it is to be vied for. This widely-accepted interpretation of power is referred to as unilateral power (Loomer, 1976) or power *over* (Kreisberg, 1986).

Loomer's (1976) insightful analysis of unilateral power centres on the idea of influencing others to attain a given goal, specifically that of the person or group in power. Loomer claims that with this orientation to inequality, "our size or stature is measured by the strength of our unilateral power. … That is, our size is determined by our ability to actualize our purposes in the context of others with their competing aims." (p. 14) Consequently, when one side gains, the other loses: we cannot look beyond ourselves to influence others without knowing that they must relinquish something in our favour.

Unilateral power based on the domination of *others* as its defining characteristic cannot *but* be unevenly distributed: "the presence of a power elite ensures an asymmetrical relationship" (Folb, 1994, p. 134) in which a fundamental imbalance exists among institutional, societal, socio-economic and cultural strata. When entire populations function within this paradigm, oppression and injustice become taken-for-granted outcomes, "par for the course" as it were. They are simply part of the price we pay for a survival-of-the-fittest approach to life. This vocabulary – "price we pay" and "survival of the fittest" – closely reflects the rhetoric of North American culture as it spreads worldwide through the mass media, education and other channels. This same attitude endorses native English speakers in their insularity by not learning other languages or even about other cultures. Historically, monolingual native English speakers, through the influence of their cultural and educational expectations and their dominant approach to dealing with non-English speakers, have equated cultural and linguistic difference with inferiority and diluted intelligence (Dorian, 1998).

Unilateral power is non-communal, based not on relationships, but on individuals (or dominant groups with a common goal) who regard their own needs and desires as overriding everything else: "others exist either as helpers, or obstacles, or possible threats to the full use of the self's power to actualize its purposes." (Loomer, 1976, p. 17) From this perspective, independence and self-sufficiency are the ultimate objectives, for "dependency on others, as well as passivity, are symptoms of weakness or insufficiency." (p. 17) By the same token, individuals are only interested in others as instruments to help pursue their own interests. The inner life of others, as well as their unique character and talents, remain invisible and unacknowledged: "unilateral power also blocks the quality of the gift that others would give to us." (p. 18)

In recalling my experiences with the foreign students who came to live with us when I was growing up, I can now discern an acute lack on both my part and that of my family to seek out and embrace the gifts they had to offer us through their various languages and cultures. Though we made the effort to create a space for them in our lives, this space was only large enough to accommodate what *we* felt was important to glean from the situation. There was a

definite imbalance of power: as English speakers, we held sway and determined whether or not we wanted to have a foreign student live with us and how much we wished to "teach" them about North American culture, seldom grasping the chance to learn. As Loomer (1976) puts it, "the freedom of the other [was] contained within the limits of our control" (p. 16). It could be argued that these people were in Canada to learn English and that they might not have been interested in sharing their language or culture with their Canadian hosts since they were here to learn and not to recreate their homeland abroad. However, we had more power as speakers of the English language, not being pushed to the same degree as our guests out of our linguistic insularity and forced to learn about a different culture and language. This situation merely reflected what we took for granted: that English alone sufficed to meet our own needs and reach our own goals. Whatever we hoped to learn from the newcomers who lived with us was learned in English and within the confines of our own culture.

The unilateral power of English displayed itself to me on many other occasions, especially while I worked and lived abroad. I lived in Hungary at a time of tremendous change: the Canadian corporation I worked for in Budapest was one of numerous other North American and western European companies making in-roads into the former Soviet satellite countries of eastern Europe. With socio-economic vulnerability and volatility at a high point, these corporations had ample opportunities to exert unilateral power by introducing former Eastern Bloc nations to the economic, political and social influences of their own capitalist societies.

This massive transformation of attitude and awareness permeated interactions between Hungarians and expatriates far beyond mere business, into the areas of culture and language. The Canadian staff at the firm I worked for had distinct advantages over the Hungarian staff. Although the company was located in Hungary and was established there for the precise purpose of "assisting" the country with a smooth transition from the state-owned corporations to a privatized "free-market" economic structure, there was a distinct top-down approach whereby Canadians, heralded as "experts", made decisions and directed Hungarians in English. These Canadian "experts" had very little social, cultural or

linguistic awareness of a place that many of them ended up living in for years. The unilateral power of English was also evident in the Hungarians' eagerness to learn the language and the Canadians' reticence to use anything but English. In choosing to communicate in English, both Hungarians and Canadians acknowledged its power as a scarce resource. While the Hungarians had less power, they had resigned themselves to learning from the more powerful Canadians. In the overlapping spheres of language, culture and society, this was a striking example of the unilateral power of English.

Domination, as Kreisberg (1986) and Folb (1994) emphasize in their conceptions of power over others, is evident in these descriptions. Pennycook (1994) cites Naysmith (1987) in his assertion that "English language teaching 'has become part of the process whereby one part of the world has become politically, economically and culturally dominated by another' (p. 3)." (p. 21) The overarching impression from my experience of living and working abroad was that English speakers tend to access jobs that have greater responsibility, higher incomes, more security, more resources and better service: "language is one criterion for determining which people will complete different levels of education. In this way, language is a means for rationing access to jobs with high salaries." (Tollefson, 1991, pp. 8-9 in Auerbach, 1993, p. 11). As Phillipson (1992) points out, these "inequalities ensure the continued allocation" (p. 47) of gains to those who speak English, opening the door to a dominant position of power.

The loss of ancient cultures and languages around the world may not be an explicit goal of ELT or of globalization. Nevertheless, powerless groups are put in a position to choose a new culture and language with the promise of more control over their lives. Many choose to learn English in the hopes that they will improve their employment and educational opportunities. While speakers of English have an undeniable advantage over those who do not know the language, those who wish to remain loyal to their first language and culture find that they must eventually let go of their diversity to succeed:

> it's not so much the tendency to learn a dominant-group language which has increased a great deal in modern times, but rather the opportunity to do so, and, concomitantly and more importantly for linguistic diversity, the tendency to abandon one's ancestral language entirely in the process. (Dorian, 1998, p. 5)

Faced with the opportunity, many who choose to learn English aspire to the prestige and power that is linked to it. Dorian cites Joseph (1987), who claims that "the power which prestigious dialects hold over non-prestigious speakers goes beyond what logic and rationality can predict or account for" (p. 8), since "social status, whatever its basis, seems very generally to rub off on language" (p. 9). The decision that many make to learn English is upheld by the appeal of its unilateral power and prestige.

Unilateral power does not come about arbitrarily, but is a given for privileged members of society. The notion of privilege is, like hegemony and unilateral power, a rarely-questioned aspect of a social structure based on an unwritten and well-understood hierarchy that separates groups of people according to their gender, language, class, race, sexual orientation, level of ability, age and many other descriptors. In the next section, I follow McIntosh's (1998) example by "unpacking" the concept of privilege and how it plays itself out through the English language. Facing privilege squarely as a barrier to multilingualism and language learning for native English speakers is one of the keys to unlocking the gate to greener grass and a deeper understanding of diverse languages and cultures.

English privilege

The title of this section was coined in a conscious effort to link the privilege that comes with the linguistic *and cultural* assumptions implicit in the hegemony of English in the world today. I am also taking the lead from McIntosh (1998) and Jensen (1998, 1999) by echoing the notions of both *male* privilege (McIntosh) and *white* privilege (McIntosh, Jensen) that are becoming familiar to a wider audience.

When I decided to earn qualifications to teach English and support my travels, I was exercising a privilege that very few people have. Growing up as an educated member of the Canadian middle-class, I was given opportunities that only a small number of people have in North America, let alone in the rest of the world. In opting to travel around the world, I was tapping into the privilege to travel and consume foreign cultures (hooks, 1992) for my own interest

and benefit. With the choice to teach English, I was grasping the unilateral power of being a native English speaker, and the privilege that comes with it to speak English wherever I went. Had I grown up elsewhere, I would not have the same privilege to meander across the globe speaking my language to whomever crossed my path; nor would I have the power to expect that most people I encountered would *want* to learn my mother tongue.

As noted earlier, privilege is bestowed upon dominant groups by the hegemony they enjoy and the unilateral power they exert over others. The privilege they have is due solely to the fact that they happen to be members of a dominant group, and not to any particular talent they possess. As a society on the whole, we (both dominant and dominated groups) are socialized to take privilege for granted and not ask why most professionals come from middle-class backgrounds, or why most political leaders are men, or why English is preferred worldwide as a second language for people to learn.

Privilege enables dominant groups to expect others to behave according to the norms they have established. Phillipson (1992) tells us that "English teaching is legitimated as being in the national and international interest. Such interests are not specified, but are assumed to be generally valid" (p. 163) This subliminal idea was present when I thought that teaching English would be a viable career move on my part, one that would also fulfill my desire to explore the world. I also believed rather vaguely that I would be making a positive contribution in my teaching by assisting people to learn English and gain access to the wealth and opportunity that came with that language. In short, I assumed wholeheartedly that English would be welcome, helpful and rewarding for all concerned. Surely the language had helped and rewarded me – why would others not want the same? This mentality stems from the idea that English is a standard to which other languages and cultures are compared.

If other languages do not provide the advantages of English, why deprive anyone of the opportunity to learn English? And by default, why would English speakers need to learn any other language? Pennycook (1994) critiques the discourse of EIL (English as an international language) and highlights the assumption that "the spread of English [is] natural, neutral and beneficial." (p. 151) The

power and "benefits" of English are acknowledged in international discourse, but there are few questions and challenges put to that power and privilege in the same discourse. The privilege that accompanies English undergirds the "myth that democratic choice is equally available to all" (McIntosh, 1998, p. 169), for those who have the privilege of speaking English can claim that with the language, doors open. What is less apparent, or definitely less acknowledged, is that they "open for certain people through no virtues of their own." (p. 167)

Most of the literature dealing with privilege looks at it from a racial perspective, though authors are clear about other forms it takes. Privilege in any of its manifestations consists of certain traits. One of these is "the privilege to acknowledge that you have unearned privilege but to ignore what it means" (Jensen, 1998, p. C-1). It is uncomfortable for native English speakers to address privilege and accept that some of the advantages they enjoy may be attributed to the fact that English is their first language, and not to any merit of their own. As McIntosh (1998) affirms in her comparison of racial privilege to gender privilege, "whites are carefully taught not to recognize white privilege, as males are taught not to recognize male privilege." (p. 165) Similarly, few native English speakers are conscious of the privilege they have when they travel to foreign countries to speak at conferences in English, order restaurant food and hail taxi cabs in English, or expect to find work teaching English. These scenarios are only possible because English is their first language, and not because of any special effort they have made. The social, cultural, economic and political complexities of these situations are considered separate from both native English speakers' monolingualism and their expectation that English will be accepted and used anywhere in the world.

These assumptions are upheld by increasing numbers of non-native English speakers who covet English through language learning, raising the demand for ever more English language teaching. Consequently, the teaching of English concentrates on the "how tos" and not the "whys". Phillipson (1992) explains: "The professional discourse around ELT [limits] the focus in language pedagogy to technical matters, that is, language and education in a narrow sense, to the exclusion of social, economic, and political matters." (p. 48) By restricting lan-

guage education to mere technicalities, it is far easier to simplify the act of teaching English and make English monolingualism a comfortable option, rendering it normal for those who teach and advantageous for those who learn. In analogous fashion, McIntosh (1998) affirms this when she writes, "Whites are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, normative, and average, and also ideal, so that when we work to benefit others, this is seen as work which will allow 'them' to be more like 'us.' " (p. 166)

Why would non-native English speakers learn English on such a scale if it were not to better "fit" into the idealized image of the glamorous, materialistic, western culture publicized through the mass media, Internet, culture and education around the world? The overwhelming message is that English is the key to attaining whatever hopes and dreams people may have for a better life. English teachers are thus dispatched, travelling eagerly, to places around the world to make "them" more like "us".

It should be remembered, however, that only a select group of people have the financial means by which to learn English formally. In this sense, the very act of learning English is transformed into a privilege, allowing a small number of people to further their education and improve their employment possibilities with the added benefits of the language. The opportunity to learn English thereby becomes a private option, one that only an individual, a private corporation or school can take up. Privilege is reproduced with each new group taking up the challenge and fulfilling the "need" to learn English.

Privilege, hegemony and unilateral power

Privilege, hegemony and unilateral power have a strong correlation with societal groups' access to money and resources. Here, issues of privatization and (de-)regulation come into play. Writing from a linguist's point of view, Hale (1998) is aware of these issues and the impact they have on the lack of choice in learning English, or other dominant languages, to keep up with hegemonic social and cultural expectations:

> [There is an] extraordinary pressure which a dominant language puts on a local language, even where the speakers of the latter are able to live together in the same community. The pressure comes

> not, of course, from the dominant language itself, but from the subtle and not-so-subtle propaganda of the associated economically dominant culture and society which encourages speakers of local languages to believe that their futures depend on switching from their native language to the dominant one. Typically, the propaganda encourages the belief that a choice is not viable – the choice of retaining the local language is thought to be incompatible with the "proper vision" of the future. (p. 215)

In other words, propaganda about English as a vehicle to a more prosperous existence often drives non-native speakers to learn it. As Jensen (1999) was told by an elderly African-American, "don't forget to pay attention to the folks who live without the privilege." (p. C-1) Such people do not benefit from the hegemony, unilateral power and privilege of English. Their lives are not validated or respected when socio-economic trends force them to abandon their home language and culture for a future they are socialized to desire. Should they choose otherwise, and keep with a traditional language and culture, the threat of a lack of opportunity in employment or education makes them think twice.

The hegemony which privileges dominant groups is so effective that unprivileged dominated groups consent to the power of English with very little resistance. The above quotation from Hale can be interpreted in light of the erosion of aboriginal or other minority languages that are continuously squelched by the expansion of English, most often among marginalized populations (Battiste, 2000; Crystal, 2000; Dalby, 2002). But English and its promise of monetary reward hold sway even with other, relatively "dominant" languages in North America. This is evident in Quebec, *despite* attempts to counteract it with bill 101:

> Un grande [*sic*] nombre de parents de toutes les origines linguistiques, *y compris des francophones*, désirent une amélioration et une intensification de l'enseignement de l'anglais, pour des raisons socio-économiques surtout.
>
> [A significant number of parents from all linguistic backgrounds, *including francophones*, express the desire for better and more intense English language teaching, especially for socio-economic purposes.] (Ferland & Rocher, 1987, p. 65, emphasis added)

The view of language education here is reductionist, mimicking economic trends and preparing students to reach individualistic goals for employment their parents feel are a matter of "common sense". While students from francophone and

other non-English linguistic and cultural backgrounds feel the need to conform to English monolingualism if they are to be privileged by its hegemony, the promise of increased wealth is not realized by all of these learners. There is, after all, only so much room at the top of the socio-economic ladder.

Pennycook (1994) criticizes the special status that English enjoys across borders, maintaining hierarchies and keeping privilege in the hands of the few who use it:

> English … has become the language of power and prestige in many countries, thus acting as a crucial gatekeeper to social and economic progress; its use in particular domains, especially professional, may exacerbate different power relationships and may render these domains more inaccessible to many people. (p. 13)

The educational and employment opportunities that English assures are not as concrete as English pupils around the world are led to believe. As with many cases of unearned privilege, *native* English speakers tend to remain in positions of power, while other speakers of English achieve moderate or lesser success (Tsuda, n.d.).

Pennycook (1994, 1998) also relates English to the dominance of the North American media. Popular culture from this continent permeates cultures and communities the world over – societal structures are deeply affected by what they see of English privilege and the dominance it confers (McIntosh, 1998). The word "dominance" here highlights the intersection between hegemony, unilateral power and privilege as different facets of what it means to participate (however actively or passively, however aware or unaware) in a systemic power imbalance. When I taught English in corporate offices in Germany to upper-management businesspeople, I was wielding the unilateral power of English hegemony worldwide and garnering the privilege of knowing English as my first language: one example is the business in Hamburg that insisted on hiring a North American teacher. This company was succumbing to the unilateral power of English used at their headquarters in the United States and their own survival in American-dominated capitalism by learning the "right" kind of English. When I was overcome with a "sense of freedom" upon receiving my English teaching certificate in Budapest, the freedom to "leave my work … and go anywhere with this passport to teaching jobs worldwide", I was taking advantage

of a privilege which my Hungarian English-speaking classmates could not enjoy. The German corporations in question went to great lengths to solidify a knowledge of English and the cultural "baggage" of values, beliefs, attitudes and customs, which is integral to its hegemony. As long as there is no consciousness of such hegemony, this "baggage" will continue to erode linguistic and cultural diversity in the world. Ultimately, everyone suffers, as "the loss of a language [and culture] represents the loss of a rare window on the human mind" (Dalby, 2002, p. 281) and on the world we all share.

What possible alternatives are there to this current situation? English speakers, especially those who are monolingual, can counteract privilege by raising their own awareness and making a shift in their cultural understanding. This consists of recognizing privilege and facing it by imagining – where possible on the basis of experience – what it feels like to be culturally and linguistically disempowered, and then acting on the basis of this increased awareness to initiate positive change. Eventually, fundamental changes to our position of privilege, and to the hegemonic power structures which support it, may occur.

Next steps

English and my experience of language learning and teaching has been examined here from the related perspectives of hegemony, unilateral power and privilege. To call attention to hegemony is a step toward counteracting it. While hegemony was the starting point for my discussion of the power imbalance between English and other languages, counter-hegemony can lead to a heightened awareness of linguistic and cultural domination and to significant changes in the teaching and learning of language, culture and diversity. By fostering *relationships* available to us as an interconnected, intercultural and multilingual society, both in Canada and further a-field, we have the opportunity to learn from others. The vitality of relationships and of a societal awareness of diversity can be explored as alternatives to the way we presently live.

Most native English speakers have not had the experience of learning a different language. The chance to appreciate the greener grass of multilingualism and a heightened awareness of cultural diversity is an avenue open to those

who are convinced that English hegemony and the privilege it perpetuates are unacceptable. By acknowledging such societal injustice and approaching counter-hegemony and relationships with others openly, it is possible to imagine a different kind of world.

In the next chapter, I describe ways to move these imaginings into the concrete realm by experiencing the vulnerability of not enjoying the privilege of English hegemony. From that experience, an engagement to action arises, opening the way to a shift in cultural awareness toward the role of language, and furthering a commitment to the growth of greener grass in the form of learning other languages. Counter-hegemony is the basis for such a shift, and I analyze it as an alternative to hegemony. Alternatives to the concepts of unilateral power and privilege also exist, particularly relational power (Loomer, 1976) [1] and the civil commons (McMurtry, 1998)[2]. But, in an effort to close the circle that opened this thesis with hegemony, and due to the limitations of its scope, I shall concentrate on counter-hegemony.

[1] For a more elaborate explanation of relational power see Loomer (1976), whose astute "alternative conception of power" is based upon relationships rather than individualistic goals.

[2] According to McMurtry (1998), the goal of the civil commons is to support and promote universal accessibility to public goods which enhance the range of life, both human and non-human.

CHAPTER FIVE:
Opening the way to greener grass

Opening the way

What role can education play in light of the stories narrated in this thesis and the theme of English hegemony which originally inspired this narrative? Counter-hegemony is a significant alternative that provides people with the insight and courage to break down the barriers that prevent so many from accessing the opportunities they deserve. If "every relationship of 'hegemony' is necessarily an educational relationship" (Gramsci, 1971, p. 350 in Sumner, 2002, p. 316), then we may conclude that counter-hegemony can work as an equally important educational tool in awakening peoples' consciousness to the injustices experienced in society. There is a pivotal role for education and learning in the *establishment* of counter-hegemony (Entwistle, 1979). In becoming more aware of the world through counter-hegemonic thought and action, we understand the need to act and change it in a continuous process of creating and supporting human relationships in community.

In this final chapter I investigate and analyze counter-hegemony as a real alternative to the hegemony of English. The unilateral power and privilege that are so closely linked to the hegemony of English are equally inhibited by counter-hegemony, which bears its strength in building relationships and communities of critically conscious learners rather than in maintaining the domination of a privileged group and the pursuit of their own individualistic goals. Following this analysis, I look at the implications counter-hegemony has for native English speakers as teachers of the English language in the ELT profession and, just as importantly, as learners of other languages. With relationships that engender a new awareness of diversity in our world, it is easier to move toward a place of greener grass where native English speakers are willing and able to

breach their cultural and linguistic boundaries, to be open to learning about other cultures and languages.

Counter-hegemony in the face of English monolingualism

The success of hegemony rests upon "the 'spontaneous consent' enjoyed by the dominant group and expressed in the organs of public opinion (such as the media, schools and churches)" (Sumner, 2002, p. 131). This "spontaneous consent" put forth by the dominated groups in society "results in a maintenance of the status quo that can be difficult to challenge because it captures the hearts and minds of ordinary people." (p. 131). What is deemed to be "common sense" or "normal" is rarely critiqued, since most people do not make the effort to comprehend the hegemony of which they are a part.

Because the very "organs of public opinion" we look to for guidance and information reproduce the hegemony of the dominant group, we are *mis*led to believe that this is simply the way things are and there is little use in opposing these "facts of life", for change is not likely to take place. Sumner (2002) refers to Brecher *et al* (2000, pp. 19-20) when she explains the strategies people employ to keep their metaphorical blinders on and adapt

> to the power relations of their world, not trying to change them:
> - belief that existing relations are good and right
> - belief that changing them is impossible
> - fear that changing them would lead to something worse
> - an ability to meet their own needs and aspirations within existing power relations
> - belief that existing power relations can and will change for the better
> - identification with the dominant groups or with a larger whole – for example, a religion or a nation
> - fear of sanctions for violation of social rules or the will of the powerful (p. 317)

Counter-hegemony consists of breaking through these fallacies of "false consciousness" (Entwistle, 1979, p. 12; Sumner, 2002, p. 316), which accept the *status quo*. An understanding of the magnitude of hegemony, that moves people to act and transform the *status quo*, arises out of groups of people coming together and sharing their experiences of hegemony and injustice. An isolated

individual suddenly sees the world in a new light when meeting other members of society whose stories are reflections of his or her own experience.

When people join together and form communities with a common cause, their collective voices can indeed convince others to think in new and different ways, thereby instigating action against the dominant hegemonic system. The action is based upon a

> withdrawal of consent [that] is enabled by encouraging reflexivity, which involves a continuous process of questioning. Such questioning can engender a transformation of consciousness that leads to the kind of active resistance and informed agency that builds a counter-hegemonic relationship. (Sumner, 2002, p. 316)

Sumner uses "reflexivity" as a term to describe the process by which we are forced by circumstance to reflect on and reconsider the way we conduct our lives. A "process of questioning" comes out of our confrontation (through reflexivity) with the absurdity and occasionally the self-destruction of our assumptions and expectations; with a new awareness, we question *why* "that's just the way it is". This fresh understanding of the realities of hegemony gives us the strength to take action by resisting and speaking out against what we formerly accepted unquestioningly. Taking action together in community brings about the strength of a counter-hegemonic voice that initiates real change.

Awareness is raised and false consciousness is broken when the drawbacks of hegemony appear and people grasp that the *status quo* does in fact *not* meet their needs or serve their best interests. "This is the moment when counter-hegemony is born, *especially as those facing problems discover that others are facing them too*." (Sumner, 2002, p. 317, emphasis added) The *eureka* moment of understanding is particularly effective in changing peoples' hearts and minds when individuals find the support of relationships and community bolsters them to openly challenge societal injustice. When I began to scrutinize power imbalances in the ESL classroom, I felt stronger in my critique once I had read articles that spoke out against this and met other instructors of English who felt the same way I did.

Counter-hegemony stems from a "crisis of authority" or a "crisis of hegemony" (Gramsci, 1971, in Sumner, 2002, p. 132) in which the collective critique spurs action to transform the *status quo*. In the ELT industry, English is

normally taught to language learners *monolingually* (Phillipson, 1992). Yet, a majority of English teachers somehow do not trust this practice and eventually do allow at least *some* amount of the first languages to be spoken in class, for a variety of reasons (Auerbach, 1993). This resonates with my own experience at the school in Vancouver where we were expected to keep a tight lid on the use of any languages other than English. In speaking with other teachers in the same situation, I realized that my own reticence to exercise this "rule" of English only was echoed by my colleagues. With this new understanding of attitudes in ELT, I felt reinforced in my criticism of this taken-for-granted way of regulating and hampering linguistic diversity in English language learning, a realization that merely underscored my grasping of the hegemony of English. In relationship with others of a similar mind, my criticism of the *status quo* in ELT moved from my inner thoughts to the public realm of research and practice, where I felt I had the chance to make my stance known and raise awareness in others.

The joining of collective forces and ideas, as well as the role of reflecting critically, were central to this type of counter-hegemonic action. As Sumner (2002) puts it, "individualistic learning strategies are ineffective in such volatile situations. Effective learning can only be realized through a kind of group learning that understands structured power relations and works to overcome them." (p. 318) Learning from relationships in community with others has a much more enduring and transformative impact than learning individually. The proverb advising that *there is strength in numbers* holds true in the case of counter-hegemony: the sum of relationships learning together in community is greater than the parts that make it up.

Counter-hegemony flies in the face of the common-sense approach we are accustomed to taking in our day-to-day lives. Counter-hegemonic action encourages us to break down the spuriousness of hegemony, to question it and witness how we are a part of it and how we can counteract it. Moreover, it demonstrates to us that it is virtually impossible to succeed in making real change as individuals, which also denies the premise of unilateral power. By definition, we cannot engage in counter-hegemony with individualistic goals; the seed of our own dissatisfaction may sprout critique, but ultimately change for

the betterment of society and for the common good must determine the goal and be undertaken in relationship with others.

Learning for the purpose of change to the *status quo* becomes the centrepiece of experience that is relational, reflective and transformative. Mezirow (1991) makes a distinction between different types of reflection in learning:

> Reflection is more than simple awareness of our experiencing or of being aware of our awareness; process reflection involves both reflection and critique of how we are perceiving, thinking, judging, feeling, and acting, and premise reflection involves awareness and critique of the reasons why we have done so. (p. 106)

Applied to the argument here, Mezirow's definition clarifies the following: when we engage in process reflection, we ask ourselves how it is that we accept and take for granted that English must be taught monolingually; by contrast, our premise reflection would bring us to question why we continue to impose this rule of English only in the classroom and perpetuate the hegemony of English. By reflecting in these different ways and learning from counter-hegemonic relationships, we can challenge the *status quo* more effectively.

Counter-hegemony among English language speakers

Reflection is vital to making sense of a (previously) unknown or incomprehensible reality: "we resort to *reflection* only when we require guidance in negotiating a step in a series of actions or run into difficulty in understanding a new experience." (Mezirow, 1991, p. 107, original emphasis) We may be led to believe that the first people to question the hegemony of English would be those who are not privileged by it and whose needs are not met by it, namely speakers of languages other than English. Few native English speakers confront the reality of linguistic isolation by not being able to communicate in their first language and being cajoled into learning a different language in order to survive. If the hegemony of English privileges native English speakers above others, what might possibly spur these members of society to question it and engage in counter-hegemony? What needs of theirs are *not* being met by English hegemony? What value does their counter-hegemonic action have? If there is a realization that hegemony is *not* in their best interest, how are native English speak-

ers most likely to question the *status quo* which privileges them, to move into an area of critique, a desire to change and willingness to learn other languages?

The privilege and power that accompany hegemony cannot satisfy even the most privileged of dominant groups in society, for meaningful relationships rank high among other elements of a satisfying quality of life (Winter, 2003). Ultimately, at a deeper level, we realize that there is a need for self-affirmation through a conscious interaction and engagement with the world (Freire, 1970). There is a genuine yearning to learn about the world we live in and explore the diversity of people we share it with. I am consistently struck by the majority of monolingual English speakers who express envy and longing when I talk about the unusual opportunities I have had to learn languages during my life. This indicates to me that the hegemony of English does not meet their needs or serve their best interests, just as it does not meet the needs of others.

Just as community and relationships with others are pivotal in effective counter-hegemony, the role of imagination is key to initiating a shift in our cultural understanding and reaching beyond what we already know. Using imagination to mentally alter the landscape we live in helps move us toward new understandings of experience and new perspectives on the world. As Mezirow (1991) claims, reflection allows us to deal with the unknown; with new perspectives arising out of reflection upon our experience, we are better able to imagine ways of being and acting that are different from what we know. Imagination is essential to building community, as Barber (1999) suggests:

> It is through imagination that private interests are stretched and enlarged to encompass the interests of others; that the wants and needs of others can be seen to resemble our own; that the welfare of the extended communities to which we belong is recognized as the condition for the flourishing of our own interests. (pp. 44-45)

By stretching our own interests, we take into account the needs and interests of others and recognize the commonalities among them. When we use our imagination to consider what would benefit a community to which we belong, we understand that only through its flourishing can our own interests grow. The individual and the common good thereby become unified.

There are ample opportunities for native English speakers to imagine a world where English hegemony does not privilege them. English language

teachers may (and do) reconsider and reflect on why they believe that teaching only in English is the best way to teach the language. Many imagine what an English language classroom would look and feel like if other languages were welcome. Although native English speakers have the upper hand when communicating with people from other language backgrounds, they may imagine what it might be like to immerse themselves in the language of a place they are travelling to or living in abroad. They may imagine the implications of learning a few words of their immigrant neighbours' language from a different country, rather than relying solely on English. Similarly, native English speakers may also imagine not having their proficiency in English recognized as a legitimate and valuable skill, as a resource in addition to the other languages they know, rather than as a liability. Many immigrants, refugees and even local citizens who have learned other languages confront this dismissive attitude when they deal with institutions such as schools, government and workplaces (Battiste, 2000; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). Native English speakers may also imagine what it would feel like to be forbidden to speak English and to be punished for doing so, as a large number of North America's first peoples have been (Reyhner, 1996).

By using imagination to critically examine our own interests in concert with those of the community, new understandings of the hegemonic position of English may arise. Communication is by nature a shared action, and language links people in relationship and in community. Societal institutions that reproduce linguistic hegemony do not mirror the yearning to learn about other cultures and languages that I have encountered among a wide variety of people. But in learning from one another and in raising awareness to this hegemony, Sumner's (2002) "group learning [of] structured power relations" (p. 318) becomes a promising goal for counter-hegemony and for awakening a cultural shift in the expectations of both the dominant and dominated groups in society. This cultural shift can come from our imagination of a different way to be in the world, respectful of all members of society and supportive of common interests rather than focused solely on our own goals and desires.

Barber (1999) claims that imagination "counts as the single most important mark of the effective citizen." (p. 44) Effective, counter-hegemonic learning

in community amongst questioning and active citizens emerges from an imaginative approach. By imagining what the interests of our community are, rather than our own, a shift in expectations and assumptions takes place. When we realize that injustice and inequality stem from individual interests and undermine the common good, it becomes apparent that *no one* in a community can meet more than merely superficial needs and reach the full potential they rightly deserve.

This shift in our interests from the individual to the communal represents an alternative to the *status quo* that we have been too fearful to approach – it is the greener grass of a more culturally and linguistically diverse community that embraces many languages and provides fertile ground in which they can thrive. This place of greener grass is one where language learning can open everyone's eyes and ears to the world, where it is normal rather than exceptional for native English speakers to speak other languages, just as it is a reality for most people in the world.

Community and counter-hegemony

The act of recognizing the interests of an entire community and comprehending "the common good" leads us to revisit the concept of community. Community is a word that is used rhetorically with little attention to and reflection on how it is applied in the contexts of our day-to-day lives. Bennett's (2003) exploration of community reiterates many of the themes and ideas that linguists put forth in their studies that decry the decline of linguistic and cultural diversity in the world (Dorian, 1998; Jocks, 1998; Nettle & Romaine, 2000; Dalby, 2002).

Bennett's (2003) discussion of community examines the concept from a variety of perspectives, including relationality and hospitality. Hospitality is of utmost importance if a community is to be a welcoming place, for in establishing a community we draw boundaries around those who are inside and those who are outside (J. McKnight, personal communication, January 13, 2004). A community's openness to those who remain outside the boundaries is an indication of *hospitality*, in the form of an invitation to come inside and connect with others. This connection is made more smoothly when we "understand the other

not in our terms, but in the other's terms" (Bennett, 2003, p. 57). This also recalls Barber's (1999) reference to imagination as an element in shifting our perspective from our own needs to those of the community, which includes others. A compassionate and open viewpoint gives the other the chance to be accepted as they are and embraced as fellow human beings with commonalities and differences to be treasured as gifts.

To cast our gaze beyond our own interests to those we share with others in community is an act of learning through imagination, relationship and counter-hegemony: moving from ourselves into the common good leads us to "empathize with the interests of others not as an act of altruism but as a consequence of self-interest imaginatively reconstructed as common interests." (Barber, 1999, p. 45) On the other hand, to disregard what others bring to our lives and to believe that we have everything we need in a sense of the isolated self constitute some of the tenets of unilateral power (Loomer, 1976). The central role of reciprocally beneficial relationships in community is underscored when Bennett (2003) writes "indifference impoverishes rather than enriches us" (p. 55). It is the flawed belief that everyone benefits equally and adequately from English hegemony which led me to make this thesis a search for greener grass. English hegemony does *not* benefit everyone: rather, it *hinders* us all from attaining our fullest possible potential through learning from mutually enhancing relationships with others.

English as a universal language and English monolingualism have not addressed the needs of global society and provided the promises of accessibility that those who support the spread of English continue to trumpet. In fact, Dalby (2002) claims that linguistic diversity actually keeps language thriving and evolving in a healthy way: "we need a multiplicity of languages because it is interaction with other languages that keeps our own language flexible and creative." (p. 285) This is no surprise for those of us who have had the chance to learn other languages and experience first-hand the impact on our understanding of language use. I feel very fortunate to have a broader range of vocabulary, grammar and structure to draw from than most monolingual English speakers, as

I grasp the links between the related languages I know and attempt to express myself in ways that are not always conventional to the structures of English.

What then are the implications of counter-hegemony and a cultural shift in the teaching and learning of English and of other languages? How can cultural and linguistic diversity be fostered so that the benefit to the common good is borne as the definitive standard? In the next sections, I discuss these issues first vis-à-vis the ELT profession and then as they relate to language learning for native English speakers. Throughout, I offer a few scenarios that depict how counter-hegemony, new relationships and new perspectives in cultural and linguistic diversity provide hopeful and meaningful alternatives to the monolingual and monochromatic hegemony of English.

Greener grass in English language teaching

In the English language classroom, who is the "expert"? Is it normally the monolingual, native-English-speaking teacher who has spoken English throughout his or her entire life? Or is it the learner, who may be learning his or her second or third or sixth language? Or is it possible that the expertise may be located somewhere in the common ground that the two parties share in their respective knowledge and understanding of language and learning? The question of who the expert is in a classroom (of any kind, beyond the bounds of language education) is one that many scholars have tried to resolve: there is no definitive answer, for it is in constant negotiation as each person plays a different role in educating and being educated.

Freire's (1970) concept of problem-posing education offered "the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers *and* students." (p. 59, original emphasis) This approach to teaching and learning brings teacher and learner to into a community of reciprocal education, as they engage jointly in "critical thinking and the quest for mutual humanization" (p. 62) *in relationship with one another*. This joint commitment to learning with and from one another entails respect for and validation of each and every perspective, while maintaining the right to critique and be critiqued. Problem-posing education rests upon a spirit

of inclusion and acceptance that invites everyone to contribute to and draw from the process of collective learning.

Despite such attempts to "reconcile the poles", the classroom continues to be a site of the reproduction of societal power relations (Auerbach, 1993; Connell, 1993; Corson, 1993) and, in the case of ELT, English hegemony. How can this change concretely? If power rests in the hands of teachers, there must be a fundamental change in teachers' awareness of what is learned, who learns and how they learn. Not *all* the power remains with teachers, though, so learners can also alter their perspectives in terms of what they expect in the process of language education.

Auerbach (1993) sent ripples through the ETL industry when she proposed that not only would it be desirable to allow English language learners to speak their first language in the English classroom, but beneficial to the learning process, because "the exclusive use of English in teaching ESL has come to be seen as a natural and commonsense practice" (p. 9). Her article took a counter-hegemonic stance by encouraging teachers of English to be critical of the *status quo*. According to Auerbach, teachers must be open to their learners and their needs, and not to the demands of the standard ESL curriculum permeated with the hegemony of English. She asserted that other languages in learners' repertoires are *resources* in the process of learning English, and not the liabilities they are usually dismissed as. Like Freire (1970), Auerbach (1993) calls for "reconceptualizing the notion of expertise to legitimate the knowledge and experience of nontraditional experts from the communities of the learners." (p. 9) Again, this relies upon a basic respect for and acceptance of what learners can contribute to a *collective* learning process, including what the teacher learns from his or her students or learners.

While it is important to offer opportunities for learners to use English in an ESL classroom, learners whose other language skills are not recognized may withdraw from the process rather than be motivated to learn more. Auerbach (1993) claims that a heavy-handed approach to monolingual English teaching, especially for learners who have limited literacy and schooling in their first language, may lead to "severe consequences in terms of self-esteem; their sense of

powerlessness is reinforced either because they are de facto excluded from the classroom or because their life experiences and language resources are excluded." (p. 18)

On the other hand, if learners' first languages are encouraged and used when they need extra support in the process of learning English, "numerous accounts suggest that [this] may actually facilitate this process." (Auerbach, 1993, p. 19) When the teacher of English emphasizes that learners already have a wealth of understanding with their first language, and learners believe this, they are far more willing to take risks in learning English and grasping new concepts of a different language. By inviting learner participation and linguistic diversity in the creation of an ESL class that meets learners' needs and truly respects their lives and their experiences, a community of learners (Freire, 1970) is born that permits "language learning to become a means of communicating ideas rather than an end in itself." (Auerbach, 1993, p. 20) In relationship with one another, teacher and learners are exposed to a universe that binds them in a new experience of learning together and embracing the possibilities each has to offer the others in the process. A respectful and open community where teachers make a conscious effort to validate learners' talents and experiences is much more likely to thrive and bring about a mutually educational environment that benefits everyone.

In thinking back to my experiences of teaching where the "English only" rule was stringently exercised, I recall a feeling of emptiness when I reprimanded students for speaking other languages. As an enthusiastic learner of languages, I secretly wanted to cheer them on in their clandestine conversations or perhaps even join in if I knew what they were discussing. Often, students who spoke different languages would teach each other a basic vocabulary of their respective idioms and then share this new knowledge with others, whether they were teachers or learners. Because of the "English only" rule at the school, this practice was also frowned upon, though not to the same extent as learners speaking their own language amongst themselves. These memories came back to me when I read Auerbach's (1993) affirmation that this is in fact a positive aspect of the learning process and of creating a community open to diversity: "[first

language] use [is] a way to value cultural diversity as students teach each other vocabulary or expressions in their own languages." (p. 21) In this way, learners can truly feel like experts, teachers, and co-learners in community.

The polarity between teacher and learners may also be resolved and overcome by ensuring that learners have the opportunity "to decide what should happen in the classroom." (Auerbach, 1993, p. 23) This can be a challenge for some teachers, accustomed to being the "expert" and having the power of authority in the classroom. But, especially in adult education, it is crucial that learners feel they have some control over what they learn and how they learn it. Often, when learners are able to decide, the process they follow is very close to what the teacher would have done: "when students are invited to regulate language use themselves, they consciously use the target language more, and the teacher's role as ESL enforcer or corrector diminishes." (p. 24) Adult learners are quite aware of what they need to do in order to achieve their educational goals; if they are to learn a language, they know they will need to practice using that language. As both a teacher and student, I have found most learners to be just as strict with themselves as their teachers in demanding that a certain commitment to the educational process is maintained.

The educational interaction in an ESL classroom goes beyond the bounds of simply learning a language. A monolingual, native-English-speaking teacher is not at all the ideal instructor for learners who need empathy and understanding in their learning process and how to apply their new knowledge in their lives. Auerbach (1993, 1994) gives examples of refugee learners who come to class with questions regarding legal matters pertaining to discrimination, housing and employment, and she argues "there is something about having actually lived these realities which enables immigrant teachers to make connections that are otherwise not possible." (Auerbach, 1993, p. 26) While Auerbach highlights the expertise of immigrant teachers, I see value in what language learning can bring to native English speakers. A multilingual native English speaker may or may not have gone through the process of immigration, but if they have been immersed in another language and culture, they will have some notion of the challenges that face newcomers and language learners. They will express empathy

towards those challenges, which is often a large part of bringing comfort to learners who are confused or fearful of what they face in a new homeland. This issue relates to crafting a safe and respectful space for learners to feel that their educational needs and goals are supported. Not only can the process of language education become more interactive and participatory (Auerbach, 2001), but monolingual native English speakers can learn other languages so that they may grasp what learners are experiencing in the classroom and beyond.

If language education were a more central component of the mainstream curriculum, ESL classes would probably have a very different profile. Had instructors experienced the challenges of learning languages themselves, they would have a very different approach to imposing language regulations on learners. The pedagogical relationship that presently supports the hegemony of English would be upset by a relationally-based, community-aware standpoint that honours a broader range of knowledge rather than the top-down, teacher-knows-best practice we see in many cases. For this reason, I believe it is vital for native English speakers to have real opportunities to learn other languages.

If multilingualism can offer so many benefits, why is it not more prevalent among native English speakers? What infrastructure and expectations need to change in order for multilingualism to become a realistic and worthwhile option for monolingual English speakers? The next section will provide arguments and examples that demonstrate why multilingualism is the greener grass we need for a cultural shift toward relationships and communities that pay tribute to cultural and linguistic diversity in our society.

Greener grass in the experience of multilingualism

How can native English speakers have real opportunities to learn other languages? If hegemony in our culture, school system and media has shrouded our view of what it means to truly embrace diversity in relationship with others, counter-hegemony is certainly a step toward transforming the situation. But for change to take root and make a lasting, fundamental shift in our social and cultural perspective of linguistic hegemony, first-hand knowledge of what speakers of other languages experience is vital.

Experience can be one of the most effective ways of opening our eyes to alternative viewpoints of the world. First-hand experience, whether in an informal or a formal setting, is the most enduring type of learning, for it involves the whole person in what he or she sees, hears, and feels. Learning that invites the whole person into a full experience is not especially valued at present, as Apps (1996) makes clear:

> Learning *from* relationships rather than learning *for* relationships is a difficult shift in thinking for many of us. We are so accustomed to the idea that learning should have an external purpose that we have difficulty comprehending that learning, particularly learning that involves the whole person, can have value in and of itself. (p. 52, original emphasis)

Our primary expectations of the learning process are that what we take away from education must serve us somehow: it is imperative that we "use" everything we learn. Apps' referral to learning *for* relationships describes this utilitarian perspective that is dominant in our culture. When we learn *from* relationships, we open our perspective to others and learn from what they have experienced. This type of learning may not serve any specific goal, but it enables us to be more aware of community, and more respectful, accepting and empathetic toward others.

On the basis of my own experiences of language learning, I have argued that by encouraging multilingualism and fostering relationships in communities of linguistic diversity, it is possible to counter English hegemony. Without the experiences related here, my arguments would have little weight. My learning of other languages has opened up the world that others experience, a world that I could never have explored as a monolingual English speaker. I did not wish to learn *for* relationships by learning languages to attain a certain goal. I hoped to gain a better understanding of other cultures and humanity as a whole, seeking out relationships to learn *from*, and experiencing the world through other languages and cultures. Apps (1996) stresses how this type of experiential learning is often more meaningful than what is currently espoused: "it is bewildering for many people that the most profound learning they do may have no immediately recognizable outcome." (p. 53)

I have analyzed some of the alternatives available to teachers of English in the ESL profession. With the argument that we must look at different ways of approaching education, I now look at how this can have an impact on the educational opportunities that are presented to the average North American native English speaker.

Introducing native English speakers to multilingualism

One of the first things to change in order for language learning to become central is the curriculum which perpetuates hegemony on a grander scale in society. Connell's (1993) critique of hegemony in school curricula is significant in this regard; he claims that "the mainstream curriculum is hegemonic in the society at large in the sense that it is part of the cultural and practical underpinning of the ascendancy of particular groups – capitalists and professionals, men, *Anglos*" (p. 38, emphasis added). To approach education from a counter-hegemonic stance, the special viewpoint of dominated learners must be considered and even incorporated into the wider curriculum:

> the position of those who carry the burdens of social inequality is a better starting-point for understanding the totality of the social world than is the position of those who enjoy its advantages. … At its simplest, *this standpoint yields experiences and information not normally available to the dominant groups*, and therefore overlooked or marginalized in their constructions of knowledge. (p. 39, emphasis added)

This point could not have been made more clearly to me than by witnessing how my husband deals with being a native speaker of a different language in Canada. Although he speaks nearly flawless English, his accent is detectable. For the longest time, I thought this was an endearing characteristic and could never understand my husband's frustration with people who immediately ask him, "Oh, where's your accent from?" or declare triumphantly: "You must be from Germany – I can tell from your accent!" I would try to soothe what I assumed to be a bruised ego, or even dismiss his irritation, by clarifying that this is how Canadians establish a connection with newcomers. Finally, my husband explained his perspective to me: *he* felt, regardless of what the person's intent was, that people were letting him know they *knew* he was not from Canada and

he was not one of "them"; he was and would remain an outsider as long as he spoke the way he did. Suddenly, his hurt became all too obvious to me and I felt uncomfortable that I had not understood this beforehand. His experience of being isolated and marginalized because of his accent (and sometimes for the cultural stereotypes of being German) was not available to me as a native-English-speaking Canadian.

In the Canadian curriculum, core issues of racism and cultural or linguistic discrimination are not conveyed by the primarily European-based, and specifically English-speaking, cultures that influence textbooks and teaching. This cultural and linguistic bearing continues at the post-secondary level in the Canadian education system. Connell (1993) uses feminism with its inclusion of women's experiences of gender discrimination and gender relations as an example of how the landscape of social theory and the social sciences has been altered with "a major reconfiguration of the existing domain of knowledge, as well as the addition of experiences not previously included." (p. 41) He concludes that "an understanding of the central mechanisms producing a social structure is available through the experience of the groups *subordinated* by those mechanisms, not through the experience of the groups advantaged by them." (p. 41, original emphasis) This has become more apparent to me as I have situated myself in a reverse role by learning other languages and not having the "authority" of English to come to my rescue.

Native English speakers must be willing to open themselves to the perspective of the dominated and learn to relinquish the power and privilege that are based on the hegemony of English. But, as Loomer (1976) says, "we seldom relinquish our power voluntarily" (p. 16), so it becomes important to consider ways in which the experience of counter-hegemonic education can bring native English speakers to a recognition of their privilege and a willingness to change the *status quo*.

Education holds a pivotal position for change to occur through counter-hegemony (Entwistle, 1979). Indeed,

> that [Gramsci] himself saw education as integral to [the establishment of a counter-hegemony] is indicated by the rubric which the first issue of *L'Ordine Nuovo* carried on its masthead: 'Instruct

> yourselves because we shall need all our intelligence. Agitate because we shall need all our enthusiasm. Organise yourselves because we shall need all our power.' (p. 14)

Education is about forging bonds that enlighten original thought and open a forum for all who wish to participate. While the context of Gramsci's work in 1920s Italy is somewhat removed from that of North America at the beginning of the 21st century, his call for counter-hegemonic education is still compelling. The three imperatives that he uses: *instruct*, *agitate* and *organize*, are paired with qualities that have deep transformative effects on communities wishing to change for the betterment of all: *intelligence*, *enthusiasm* and *power*. Instructing for intelligence gives people the opportunity to equip themselves with the knowledge needed to reach their own potential and thus better contribute to their community. Agitating for enthusiasm implies the need to raise awareness and passion through action in the hearts and minds of ordinary people. By taking action, they further reach their potential with concrete support lent to the knowledge acquired in "instructing for intelligence". Finally, organizing for power demonstrates that in coming together to harness and channel intelligence and enthusiasm, a community can make enduring change happen to the benefit of the common good.

Gramsci's message in *L'Ordine Nuovo* is affirmed by the words of Watson Thomson: "Education for the People – all the People. Education for action – co-operative, responsible action. Education for change – inevitable and desirable change. Power to the People." (cited in Welton, 1987, p. 156). Thomson was a formidable if controversial advocate of community-based adult education in the first Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) government under Tommy Douglas in 1940s Saskatchewan. He believed strongly in the power of dialogue "to break through internal divisions of class, race, and sect to find the 'truly human' ground of commonality" (p. 151) and the importance of raising awareness and "activating" citizens to bring positive and fundamental change to communities around the province.

"Instruction", as Gramsci calls it, informs action and provides the basis for concrete change to take place through "doing" in addition to "talking" (Barber, 1999). Organizing presents a conduit for action to move through in order to

transform the deeply-entrenched "common sense" that perpetuates hegemony. With counter-hegemonic education, action and organization, every member of a community is embraced for their inherent value as a diversely gifted human being. Father Moses Coady, founder of the Antigonish movement for adult education in 1920s Nova Scotia, said that the primary goal of adult education was "a full and abundant life for *everyone* in the community." (Kidd, 1973, p. 243, emphasis added) This becomes a reality only when members of a community take informed action based on what they have learned from their relationships with one another, and organize new ways of being in community so that each person may reach his or her potential.

Societies and cultures comprise communities and relationships. The wide variation of insight, knowledge and vision that exists in a community is shared through relationships and language. Valuing the common good by honouring diversity in ideas and knowledge means valuing the use and learning of other languages and their cultures so that all may be included in an empowering process of educating, acting, agitating, and organizing.

In Canadian society and the education system, we are accustomed to convenient parcels of culture and language being dispensed in the form of designated cultural days or ethnic food festivals. It is acceptable for various cultural communities to contain a language within the limits of their group, but it need not spill over into the rest of the population. The issue of language "revitalization" is a case in point, whether for immigrant heritage languages or aboriginal languages. These programs are mainly oriented toward maintaining these languages, albeit in a marginalized position, to be spoken only by minority groups that use them amongst themselves (Crystal, 2000; Huss, Grima & King, 2003; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). For true change and linguistic diversity to occur, these marginalized languages need to become accessible, valued and learned by the dominant, English-speaking culture that surrounds them. What good does it do to provide language learning only to people who have lost their language – why not provide it to all members of society who speak no more than one language? What really needs to change is the *breadth of exposure* that language education has among the dominant cultural group. With an increase in the awareness of

cultural and linguistic diversity through counter-hegemonic education, it is realistic to believe that the hearts and minds of people will change vis-à-vis linguistic difference and cultural diversity.

The experience of diversity that I had in my travels was an education not only in gaining multilingual language skills, but in seeing the world from diverse perspectives and in growing as a whole person in the process. As is typical of many people whose eyes are opened to new experiences abroad, I felt I learned just as much from my travels as I had in any formal educational setting. There is no reason why the educational boundaries in institutions could not be pushed further toward a more transformative experience that would change learners' perspectives and offer them other alternatives in thinking. In his discussion of a counter-hegemonic curriculum from the standpoint of the least advantaged, Connell (1993) argues that an emphasis on the "standpoint of the least advantaged" creates a sounder base of knowledge:

> It is also likely to be a source of enormous enrichment for the experience and knowledge of the advantaged groups. … But this is not to say that taking this standpoint is easy for advantaged groups. Justice is not a question of ease and it is the opposite of anaesthesia. At the best of times it is likely to mean trouble. (Connell, 1993, p. 44)

As I have learned about other experiences from my husband and from being immersed in different languages, my mind and heart have been opened to an understanding of different perspectives and sensibilities. In gaining insight through the experiences of others, I do feel my life and understanding of the world has been vastly enriched because my awareness has been heightened by my exposure to other viewpoints. While this has not always been easy or comfortable, I have occasionally felt awkward in the presence of the narrow-mindedness of some of my fellow native English speakers when they wonder aloud, for instance, why aboriginal people in northern communities do not learn English rather than their own languages. As Connell says, this new-found awareness acquired from other perspectives "is the opposite of anaesthesia" – in many ways, ignorance is indeed bliss.

Counter-hegemonic education not only brings learners to recognize injustice, but it also develops new and different values in dominant groups. As na-

tive English speakers face the hegemony of English by learning other languages and grasping the value of multilingualism, they are transformed by the experience of vulnerability, empathy and humility.

As a high school student surrounded by familiar people and places in a small British Columbia town, moving into the cacophony of a hard-edged, urban, Québécois setting with few recognizable details to grasp was an exercise in vulnerability that I could never have imagined. I could no longer amuse my friends with humorous nuances; I could not appeal to my teachers with flourishes of expression, and I had difficulty manoeuvring through the day-to-day expectations of my new community and school mates. It was not until much later, in adulthood, that I realized how becoming vulnerable in those times had served me so well. That taste of vulnerability taught me that I do not know everything, and never will. It taught me to listen to others and be willing to learn from them. I still struggle in some cases, and feel that I have to strengthen my own position in dealing with others, but the knowledge that I do not have all the answers reminds me to remain humble and open to what others bring into my life and my world.

The only reason I had the good fortune to live and study in Quebec is because my parents were not satisfied with the curriculum in BC. I am aware that this opportunity was a tremendous privilege and I would never assume that any Canadian could have the same experience. But exchanges take place as part of the standard curriculum; why do these learning experiences not succeed in having a deeper effect on students? They are set in the context of the hegemonic curriculum, which allows little, if any, room for counter-hegemonic experience and discussion, for the establishment of relationships that can critique injustice and truly embrace diversity. Were learners to have the opportunity to learn from the issues that affect the languages and cultures they study, rather than being restricted to the confines of grammar and vocabulary, they could begin to experience a real engagement with the process of learning another language. Bennett (2003) reminds us that "respectful engagement requires willingness to suspend initial scepticism about the other as well as to put one's own

cards on the table – to indicate one's own position and its support, however vulnerable that makes one." (pp. 58-59)

Vulnerability is complemented by empathy when, as language learners, we no longer feel under threat but can be open to the perspective of the other, through their culture and their language. As I revisited my mother's language in Hungary and was forced to cope with linguistic challenges presented to me in different ways each day, I grew into a fresh understanding of who Hungarians are, why Hungarian culture has developed the way it has and how the people and the culture have arrived at the point they are at in the present. At times, I felt submerged by the culture, but happy to be in it and renewed by a sense of clarity through the language: with it, I became empathetic to the people and the place. Barber (1999) refers to empathy, in addition to imagination, as "key to humankind's social skills." (p. 45)

In her book *Hope: New philosophies for change*, Zournazi (2003) converses with a number of intellectuals on the theme of hope in today's world. In a conversation with Nikos Papastergiadis, she asks him to elaborate on empathy in relation to hope and "how empathy is something that's very human and important in understanding otherness and foreign experience" (pp. 94-95). Papastergiadis responds by explaining that

> empathy shouldn't be confused with a completely mindless or uniform absorption into the other because it *isn't* a non-critical adoption of the other. It isn't simply seeing the world purely as another person sees the world and trying to be at one with the other. Empathy is a much more dynamic process: of going closer to be able to see, but also never forgetting where you are coming from, and how that process of coming and going actually alters both where you came from and where you have arrived. For me, empathy is about that process of *surrender* to the other and to learn with the other, but also the *catch* that transforms your perception. (Papastergiadis in Zournazi, 2003, pp. 95-96, original emphasis)

Papastergiadis alludes to the metaphor of a shuttlecock in badminton to illustrate the back-and-forth movement that takes place (sometimes subconsciously) as we compare new experiences of difference and diversity with what we already know and believe about the world. He emphasizes that we do not move toward the other without first analyzing what their experience means or what it might teach us. Of yet greater importance is how we incorporate the other's position

appropriately to fit with our own previously-conceived frame of reference. If we imagine a shuttlecock gliding through the air, it surrenders first to the air current and then gravity before being caught by the player's racket and gently struck to again surrender to the air. Similarly, we surrender first to a process of learning from and with the other, are then caught by the contrast or similarity of their experience, and finally return to our own way of being and thinking, enhanced by newfound ideas and experiences we can empathize with.

My experience in Hungary was a process of learning about diversity through empathy. It meant looking through the other's eyes and hearing with the other's ears, while still recalling what my own perspective told me of the world, and witnessing the melding or occasional clashing of these two standpoints. The empathy that took seed in Hungary has survived long past my departure from Budapest and has inspired in me a genuine effort to remain open to other cultures, whether I understand their language or not.

Despite that effort to remain open, I am nonetheless enmeshed in the hegemony of English which privileges me as a native English speaker. With vulnerability and empathy, I can see and feel what the other experiences, but I may not always remember and act upon what I have learned. To keep a balanced view and to remind myself that I am not always right or knowledgeable, it is vital to stay humble. Humility is not a highly-valued quality in our society, bound by the "common sense" attitudes of capitalism, individualism and competition. Yet if we are to move toward other perspectives, humility is necessary to achieve success in building relationships (Bishop, 2002) of counter-hegemony that can bring about effective, long-term change. With humility we make the effort to listen to and be taught by others, capturing opportunities that would have otherwise been overlooked.

Interconnectedness

With a counter-hegemonic approach to teaching and learning language, we build strong relationships in community and grow in new ways, imagining other perspectives and shifting our cultural and linguistic awareness. This awareness

of diversity can be sustained by experiencing multilingualism first-hand and grasping what it means to be vulnerable, empathetic and humble in our relationships with others.

The penultimate chapter of this thesis opened with a visual image depicting the links between hegemony, unilateral power and privilege. Before closing this final chapter, I wish to illustrate the interconnectedness of counter-hegemony, community and multilingualism in education in a similar way with a Venn diagram:

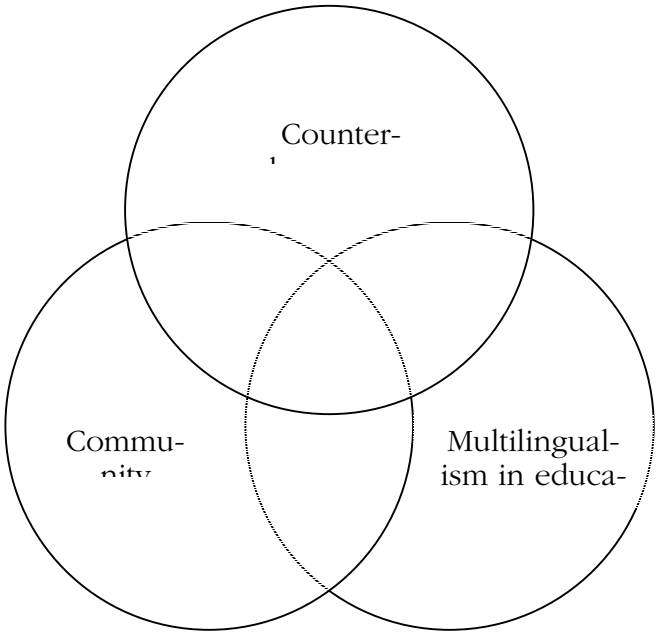

Figure 2: The interrelationship between counter-hegemony, community and multilingualism in education

Counter-hegemony aims to break down the false consciousness (Entwistle, 1979; Sumner, 2002) of hegemony that upholds the *status quo*. The effectiveness of counter-hegemony rests upon relationships in community that raise awareness to the injustice and erroneousness of power structures in a hegemonic society. The nature of community lends the opportunity to expand the self's interests and needs to recognize both the needs of others and the

common good which makes their flourishing possible. Without the relationships that support the common good and inspire the individual to shift beyond the self, the individual cannot grow. In order to have real insight into the needs of others, we must use our imagination to open ourselves to other perspectives with hospitality, empathy, vulnerability and humility. When members of a community begin to imagine a realm beyond their individual interests, this shift in consciousness opens up new possibilities for the community as a whole. These relationships of learning build on the experience of everyone in the community in order to initiate change to the *status quo*.

It is vital to understand the importance of *everyone's* experience in a community, especially inviting those on the margins into relationships of learning. Groups which do not normally have the chance to share their perspective of the world must be listened to if a community is to focus on the common good. Learning from the standpoint of the least advantaged (Connell, 1993) helps raise the consciousness of the dominant group in a community. With a new awareness, both dominant and dominated groups may work together in counter-hegemony as they become critical of the *status quo* and act to change it. In the context of this thesis, the standpoint of the least advantaged is that of non-native English speakers who are not privileged by the hegemony of English. Multilingualism in education creates the chance to open our hearts and minds to cultural and linguistic diversity by bringing about a transformation in awareness that will honour the contributions of all. Multilingualism in teaching means making the ESL classroom a place of mutual education (Freire, 1970) by embracing expertise and diversity in a community of learners. Multilingualism in learning means native English speakers have the opportunity to learn from the experiences of non-native English speakers in their community through counter-hegemonic language programs in school and beyond. For cultural and linguistic diversity to be sincerely respected, and for change in the *status quo* of English hegemony to occur, learning different languages needs to be a tangible reality for native English speakers both in Canada and elsewhere.

While it is encouraging to think of the possibilities that multilingual learning in a counter-hegemonic community may bring, it is crucial to recognize that

there are currently severe barriers to the implementation of these proposals. Deep-seated institutional resistance is considerable in the face of counter-hegemonic approaches to learning in community that dismantle power imbalances, and authentically acknowledge and embrace relationships and different perspectives. Future research could look at what strategies are needed to address changes in policy that open the opportunities for multilingual education for both adults and children.

Where is the greener grass?

My thesis began with a search for greener grass. Supported by the hegemony, power and privilege of English, most monolingual native English speakers believe they have no reason to learn another language. It does not occur to most people that multilingualism is an option worth investigating and choosing. Many are convinced that English provides whatever communication skills are needed to deal with situations where speakers of other languages are involved. To boot, with so many non-native speakers clamouring to learn English, it seems pragmatically pointless to invest time, energy and money in learning other languages.

Of course, the common rhetoric from governments does not always echo this attitude – bilingualism in Canada continues to be touted as an enormous asset. But in reality, from the perspective of a multilingual native English speaker, English is the preferred language to attain socio-economic success. As a nation of immigrants, most newcomers to Canada have adopted the language of one group of early immigrants – the British – who managed, by persuasion and by brute force, to colonize the country. This dull uniformity of linguistic homogenization in Canada is far from the vibrant and open community that is portrayed in publicity that acclaims our "multicultural mosaic". Catch-phrases such as these are little more than tokens to placate minorities; they do nothing to raise the awareness of the English-dominant culture to the hegemony of English and the importance of nurturing linguistic diversity on a large scale.

The greener grass I seek lies in a society that welcomes diversity and wishes to learn through counter-hegemony so that all may thrive on the contributions of various cultures and their languages. The complacent approach to

language learning that we currently experience and function within in our day-to-day, institutionalized existence simply does not meet the needs of our society, English speaking or not. The hegemony of English prevents all of us from gaining insight from worlds of language that offer valuable elements of different cultures – elements that have significant answers to our many questions pertaining to historical accounts, scientific advancement, philosophical or theological dialogue, and myriad other issues that humanity grapples with. Building relationships of mutual learning through counter-hegemony rouses us from this complacency and opens the way toward a diverse society of greener grass where multilingualism is not exceptional, where cultural and linguistic diversity is not relegated to a special dish or a commemorative day, and where there is a willingness to relinquish privilege and power to change the *status quo* for the betterment of the common good.

Greener grass *is* a genuine possibility for monolingual English speakers open to growth, change and learning in relationship with others of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. For those unable to recognize the inherent advantages of learning other languages, a counter-hegemonic approach to education offers the bigger picture necessary to understand the importance of linguistic diversity. On a superficial level, the greener grass of multilingualism may seem chaotic and cacophonous, but from the standpoint of monolingual speakers, all languages except one are chaotic and cacophonous. In a situation where everyone speaks more than one language, relationships are strengthened by vulnerability, empathy and reciprocity in learning: everyone enjoys advantages by speaking some languages and disadvantages by not speaking others. The greener grass of multilingualism opens in us a way to achieve authentic diversity in community and an alternative to the hegemony of English.

We must conquer the fear of leaving behind the supposedly tried-and-true, the fear of losing what we know. Rather than expecting the other to integrate and become like "us", perhaps we can risk looking at the other side and moving toward an understanding of "them". In letting go of the *status quo* of English hegemony and learning about diversity through other languages, we may be surprised to discover a far brighter, richer place that provides an abiding

welcome and ultimate fulfillment for all. We know where the greener grass lies – we must now find the courage to take the first step on the path that leads us there.

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